

Stalemate in the Holy Land

A Critical Examination of Palestinian-Israeli Interreligious Initiatives as Track-II Diplomacy

Tyler James Dale Hauger



Master's Thesis – Peace and Conflict Studies

University of Oslo

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Summary

The purpose of this thesis is to advance the state of knowledge on two bodies of literature related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, namely *track-II diplomacy* and *religion and peacebuilding*. Two primary research objectives are considered: first, to analyze the extent that current interreligious initiatives between Israelis and Palestinians can be characterized as track-II diplomacy; second, to identify what Palestinian and Israeli religious leaders view as key possibilities, as well as major obstacles, toward a viable interreligious track-II channel.

Findings from in-depth interviews conducted with Muslim, Christian, and Jewish leaders in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories suggest that interreligious track-II efforts may be uniquely positioned to address many of the religiously sensitive issues of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, yet face many of the same limitations as traditional track-II models. They struggle to make a vertical impact on the formal political channels, face the challenge of recruiting ideal participants, and take on several formal track-I-like characteristics that are contrary to track-II diplomacy. Ultimately, religious leaders may be better positioned to transfer mutually generated ideas horizontally rather than prompting a formal track-I peace agreement between parties. Nevertheless, Palestinian-Israeli interreligious track-II efforts can undoubtedly be recognized as an underutilized subset of track-II diplomacy.

Acronyms

CRIHL	Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land
ICCI	Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel
MK	Member of the Israeli Knesset
OCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
PA	Palestinian National Authority

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Foreword

The term “stalemate” refers to the point when a conflict has reached an impasse, and resolution seems impossible (i.e. a no-win situation). This thesis is dedicated to those in Palestine and Israel who are forced to bear the daily, lived realities of this stalemate. May they find the support, will, and courage to keep striving for a just peace and human rights for all.

Acknowledgments

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All mistakes and omissions in this work are mine.

Tyler Hauger

Oslo, May 2011

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

For over 60 years, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has eluded any viable peace settlement and has dominated the headlines. Like other intractable conflicts¹, official contact between the conflicting parties is often tense, or even non-existent, and the prospect of finding a solution that is perceived by all parties as less costly than continued fighting seems even more daunting over time. The need for alternative mechanisms to break stalemate, to address the needs of the parties, and to support a just peace remains a pressing concern.

In recent decades, scholars and practitioners have increasingly viewed *track-II diplomacy* as one possible mechanism for conflict management and resolution between Israelis and Palestinians.² Joseph Montville (1992, 255) defines track-II diplomacy as “unofficial, informal interaction among members of adversarial groups or nations with the goals of developing strategies, influencing public opinion, and organizing human and material resources in ways that might help to resolve the conflict.” Proponents of track-II diplomacy argue that such unofficial dialogue outside of government-to-government negotiations can address issues that would seem outside the range of more formal diplomatic channels as well as transfer new ideas to both the grassroots populations and formal political channels. Thus, a significant amount of research has been conducted on track-II efforts³ between Israelis and Palestinians.⁴

¹ Crocker et al. (2005, 5) broadly define intractable conflicts as those conflicts which “have persisted over time and refuse to yield to efforts – through either direct negotiations by the parties or mediation with third-party assistance – to arrive at political settlement.”

² This thesis thematically corresponds with a paper written for PECOS 4100 in autumn 2010 on track-II diplomacy, yet consists of its own independent research and conclusions.

³ This thesis uses the terms “track-II diplomacy,” “track-II efforts,” and “track-II initiatives” interchangeably.

⁴ See Funk (2000), Kaye (2001), and Cuhadar (2009).

While the field is certainly not lacking in diversity, one particular theme and set of participants that have been thoroughly understudied relates to the role of *religion* in the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. Whereas most scholars and analysts would reject the notion that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is religious in nature, it would be an oversimplification to assume the conflict is entirely secular.⁵ Religious symbols, language, rituals, and identities affect the perceptions and behavior of even those Israelis and Palestinians who do not characterize themselves as religious. The conflict is saturated with examples of religious beliefs and rituals being used to justify violence and forceful policies, and it is increasingly being framed as a zero-sum, religious war. As Cohen (2005, 347) points out: “The conflict’s intractability is exacerbated by the subtext of religion-based historical perceptions, theological or quasi-theological judgment, and aspersions and popular myths cast about the relationship among Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.” Thus, the lack of research explicitly conducted on the possibility for an *interreligious track-II diplomatic effort* represents a major gap in both literature on track-II diplomacy, and literature related to religion and peacebuilding.⁶

1.2 Focus of the Present Research and Research Objectives

Based on the assumption that track-II diplomacy indeed has the potential to ease tensions between parties and pave the way for political solutions, this research aims to advance the state of knowledge on two bodies of literature related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Primarily, this study addresses the gap found in literature on *track-II diplomacy* by exploring the possibilities and limitations of religious actors serving in track-II roles in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories.⁷ At the same time, this research also aims to supplement current literature on *religion and*

⁵ Rabbi Marc Gopin (2002, 108) writes: “There is no such thing as a protracted and intractable conflict that is exclusively religious, and it is quite possible that there is no such thing as a nonreligious conflict.”

⁶ This thesis employs the broad term “peacebuilding” to describe activities that go beyond crisis intervention and emphasize the establishment of a durable, sustainable peace.

⁷ “The occupied Palestinian territories” is the official term used by the United Nations to describe the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. See OCHA (2010).

peacebuilding by investigating the practical linkage between interreligious initiatives and track-II diplomacy between Israelis and Palestinians. Thus, this study has two central research objectives:

- 1.) to analyze the extent that current interreligious initiatives between Israelis and Palestinians can be characterized as track-II diplomacy.*
- 2.) to identify what Israeli and Palestinian religious leaders view as key possibilities, as well as major obstacles, toward a viable interreligious track-II channel.*

The rationale for this research is two-fold. First, the success of previous track-II efforts between Israelis and Palestinians demands greater attention to the field. Efforts throughout the 1970s and 80s provided support for political leaders to make difficult decisions, while many scholars still refer to the Oslo talks of the early 1990s as the “mother of all track-II talks” due to their role in laying the framework for the later Oslo Accords.⁸ Since all concentrated track-II efforts solely included a limited pool of scholars, senior journalists, former government and/or former military officers, track-II diplomacy scholars must examine the implications and possibilities for new channels of communication; including the prospects for interreligious track-II efforts. As Jafari (2007, 126) argues, “recognition of religious peacemakers as a subset of the track II-community and as an underutilized resource” is a necessary, but currently lacking, component of the discourse.

Second, while the literature on religion and peacebuilding often briefly cites interreligious dialogue as a form of “track-II diplomacy,” minimal literature has been devoted to the actual analysis of this characterization. A more comprehensive analysis

⁸ For in-depth case studies on a number of track-II efforts that have occurred between Israelis and Palestinians, see Agha et al.’s (2003) volume “Track II Diplomacy: Lessons from the Middle East.”

of what can be characterized as track-II diplomacy, and what might be other models of peacebuilding, is required.

1.3 Overview of Methodology

Over the period of January 18th to March 1st, 2011, thirteen in-depth, qualitative interviews were conducted with religious leaders in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories (four Muslims, six Jews, and three Christians), all of whom have had extensive experience in interreligious efforts between parties. By adopting a qualitative, inductive approach, I sought to discover “the meaning that participants attach to their behavior, how they interpret situations, and what their perspectives are on particular issues” (Woods 2006, 3). Emphasis was placed on identifying the main possibilities and limitations of what I define as *interreligious track-II diplomacy* between Israelis and Palestinians, specifically through the eyes of those participating in it.

This thesis adopts an interpretist epistemology, meaning that this study attempts to understand phenomena through analyzing meanings that religious leaders in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories assign to these phenomena (Bryman 2008, 16). In order to do this, I utilize a research design that can best be described as a *cross-sectional survey with case study elements*. Cross-sectional research is used to take a snapshot of the attitudes of a subset of a particular population at a certain moment in time rather than tracking changes in attitudes. The unique context of religious leaders in the Israeli-Palestinian context, however, requires greater attention to the specific attributes of the leaders and their surroundings than a cross-sectional approach alone allows. This study therefore utilizes several case-study strategies to “richly describe, explain, or assess and evaluate a phenomenon [e.g., event, person, program, etc.]” (Gall et al. 1996, 549).

1.4 Outline of Thesis

This thesis is divided into six chapters. Chapter 2 places this study within the larger analytical and theoretical framework related to track-II diplomacy, identifying the key assumptions and aims of track-II efforts. Additionally, it provides a review of the literature on track-II diplomacy between Israelis and Palestinians and offers a discussion on theoretical and practical possibilities for religious actors serving in track-II roles.

Chapter 3 outlines the qualitative, cross-sectional/case study-based methodology employed by this research. It also provides greater detail on the epistemological assumptions and aims of the study.

Chapter 4 provides background context of the role of religion in Israeli-Palestinian conflict, offering insight from not only scholarly research, but also perceptions of local religious leaders themselves. It then begins the analysis of the extent to which current interreligious efforts can be characterized as track-II by developing a theoretical, definition that can be used to distinguish *interreligious track-II initiatives* from other interreligious efforts. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the aims of interreligious track-II initiatives (as articulated by respondents to this study) in order to assess if their aims are consistent with other track-II efforts.

Chapter 5 serves as the central chapter for identifying key obstacles and the possibilities of an interreligious track-II channel by analyzing the interviews conducted with key religious leadership.

Finally, Chapter 6 provides final conclusions and recommendations for scholars and practitioners who may consider an interreligious track-II model.

2. Analytical Framework & Literature Review

This chapter highlights three important concepts related to this thesis: track-I diplomacy, track-II diplomacy, and faith-based diplomacy. Additionally, this chapter demonstrates that while previous literature has comprehensively explored both the position of track-II diplomacy in conflict resolution and the role religious actors play in peacebuilding, a serious gap still remains in the linkage between the two bodies of literature.

2.1 Traditional Track-I Diplomacy and its Limitations

With few exceptions, the current conflict between Israelis and Palestinians is time and again described as a classic example of an intractable conflict. *Intractable conflicts* are those that are deadlocked, intense, defiant, and extremely difficult to resolve (Coleman 2000). The United States Institute of Peace more specifically defines intractable conflicts as those “that have persisted over time and refused to yield to efforts – through either direct negotiations by the parties or mediation with third-party assistance – to arrive at a political settlement” (Crocker et al. 2005, 5). While such resistance to negotiations may appear to derive from a single cause, closer examination usually points to multiple causes and contributing forces.⁹

Authority to solve international disputes has traditionally been granted to the long-established, power-political “Hobbesian” approaches to international relations in

⁹ Zartman (2005) argues that five internal, process-generated characteristics combine to reinforce a conflict’s intractability: protracted time, identity denigration, conflict profitability, absence of ripeness, and solution polarization. These internal characteristics should not be understood as causal elements for the initiation of the conflict, but instead can be understood as process generated features that reinforce a conflict’s intractability. He writes: “While the characteristics are independent of each other, they also tend to reinforce on another, which in itself is an additional characteristic of intractability, making it hard to pry them apart and deal with them one by one” (2005, 55).

which state institutions are given the autonomous validity to make decisions on behalf of the people (Funk 2000). Communication and decision making is done solely by representatives of the state (or state-like structures), and is conducted with other state (or state-like) representatives. This technique, frequently characterized as *track-I diplomacy*, is “a process whereby communications from one government go directly to the decision-making apparatus of another” (Said et al. 1995, 69). More concretely defined by Nan (2003, 1), track-I diplomacy are activities that:

...involve direct government-to-government interaction on the official level. Typical track-I activities include traditional diplomacy, official negotiations, and the use of international organizations. The participants stand as representatives of their representative states and reflect the official positions of their governments during discussions.

While track-I diplomacy serves a necessary component of instigating the structural change most often required for sustained peace, critics point to a number of limitations that inhibit track-I diplomacy from bringing forth new ideas and addressing every layer of an intractable conflict. Scholars and practitioners have therefore articulated a need for alternative mechanisms beyond track-I diplomacy to manage international disputes.

2.1.1 Lack of Attention to the Conflict's Roots

Most frequently, critics of track-I diplomacy point out that the process often fails to fully address the importance of intangible human needs of the parties. This argument is frequently noted by proponents of the so-called “human relations paradigm.” Based on the theoretical and applied work of Duetch (1973), Azar (1983), Kelman (1997), and Fisher (1997), the human relations paradigm stresses the vital role that *social interactions* have in triggering, perpetuating, and resolving conflicts. Fear, distrust, misunderstanding, and hostile interactions within these social interactions (or lack of them) serve as a primary obstacle to constructive engagement. Dysfunctional cognitive and behavioral patterns cannot be easily remedied by ordinary methods of diplomacy, or the use of force, for this reason.

Azar (2003) argues that intractable conflicts are specifically rooted in the ongoing *denial, suppression, or compromise* of fundamental human needs by others. According to Azar, individuals strive to satisfy a set of enduring human needs that allow for them to grow and develop in any culture or setting. While such needs generally include concrete items like food, clothing, energy, water, safety, and productive capability (2003, 21), they can also be as indistinct as the fundamental need for the acceptance of a communal *identity* of a group. Azar (1990, 9) writes: “The formation and acceptance of identity thus also may be understood as a basic developmental need, with collective identity manifest in terms of cultural values, images, customs, language, religion, and racial heritage.” Individuals or groups will pursue such nonnegotiable needs, both tangible and intangible, no matter the cost. Therefore, traditional diplomacy may be able to address the resource-based aspects of the conflict, but fails to provide a complete resolution if it overlooks the intangible needs of each party. Azar bluntly concludes that “it is *naïve* to assume that protracted social conflicts can be managed by military or balance of power means alone” (1990, 2).

In her comparative study of intractable conflicts, Diana Chigas echoes the claim that track-I efforts have tended to overlook the human needs of parties. Chigas (2005, 126) writes:

Intractable conflicts tend to involve basic human needs and values that the parties experience as critical to their survival and, as a consequence, as non-negotiable. Traditional instruments of negotiation, mediation, and conflict management are not adequate to address these aspects of the conflict. They tend to be well suited to resolving resource-based issues...that may indeed serve as instrumental modalities for the protection of identity and human needs. But issues of identity, survival, and demonization of the other requires a process that works directly to change the underlying human relationship and deals with perceptions, trust, and fears that fuel institutionalization and self-reinforcing dynamic that sustains intractability.

Track-I diplomacy, in other words, may exhibit a number of limitations (partially explained by its structural constraints) that restrict its ability to address a party's every need. This point will be elaborated in more detail in the next section.

2.1.2 Structural Constraints of Track-I Diplomacy

Beyond the argument that track-I diplomacy can only address the resource-based aspects of the conflict, critics have also argued that the traditional government-to-government model is rigid, formal, and overly constrained due to a number of structural limitations (Hopmann 1996, 184). Former U.S. Secretary of State Harold Saunders points out three structural limitations in particular. First, a government official is generally unable to speak separately from their government. Regardless of how explicit government leaders may be about “speaking personally,” rival governments will likely perceive their words and actions as that of the official government position (Saunders 1991, 52). To a large extent, the words of government officials will commit their governments in one way or another. Thus, government officials will rarely stray far from the government’s official position. While they may be willing to explore new ways of addressing the conflict, it is very unlikely that they will speak contrary to their own government. Diplomats operate from a sense of loyalty and recognition of the need for discipline if the governmental system is to operate effectively. For this reason, rival governments will find it difficult to believe that an official would be speaking without the permission of their government or that the government unquestioningly would support the leader’s “personal” ideas.

A second related structural limitation is that government officials speak on behalf of the institution they represent, losing a very important human dimension of the relationship (Saunders 1991, 52-53). Even if they disagree with the position, or had no part in setting the position, individuals who hold a title in the government are often restricted to present only the formal position adopted by the government. They speak as if they were the institution itself rather than the people it represents. Formal negotiations consist of the exchange of such positions, and the human elements of the conflict tend to be left untouched.

Finally, Saunders writes that the third structural challenge of traditional track-I diplomacy is that governments are often unable to quickly change existing ways of thinking to respond to new situations (Saunders 1991, 54). Governments have invested time, money, resources, and lives into traditional diplomatic channels and the positions that they bring forward. They have analyzed the problem intensely and have made and reviewed every decision so far. Due to these constraints, Saunders argues that track-I diplomats are often unable to easily adapt to new ways of thinking.

2.2 The Evolution of Track-II Diplomacy

Given both the structural challenges for track-I actors to bring forth new ideas, as well as the tendency of traditional diplomatic models to overlook the non-material needs of each party, scholars argue that other mechanisms for bringing resolution to the conflict are needed. As Ambassador John W. McDonald (1999, 4), a former American diplomat, notes:

Normal state-to-state or government-to-government diplomacy has shown itself, over the years, to be incapable of resolving the vast majority of conflicts in today's world. The resolutions that are "settled" are usually based on the relative power of the parties concerned and can be unsettled if power shifts. Currently, little effort is being made to reduce conflict by attacking the basic reasons for the conflict in the first place.

Beginning during World War II, and then gaining momentum during the Cold War, the notion of a non-official diplomatic channel to fill in these gaps seemed to possess a particular appeal. Scholars began to experiment with problem-solving workshops, third party consultation exercises, and similar modalities as a means of bringing people together on an unofficial level. According to Funk (2000), terms such as unofficial diplomacy (Berman and Johnson 1977), public diplomacy (Hansen 1989), non-official mediation (Curle 1986), and analytical problem solving (Kelman 1997) were increasingly discussed, studied, and practiced as a possible second track of diplomacy as early as the 1960s.

The term *track-II diplomacy* was eventually coined by William D. Davidson and Joseph V. Montville in 1981 to describe all models of unofficial initiatives that aimed to support the resolution of a conflict situation (1981, 155). The term was originally used to illustrate the necessity of a second track to the formal negotiation channels between governments, and was re-defined by Montville (1992, 255) to specifically refer to:

...unofficial, informal interaction among members of adversarial groups or nations with the goals of developing strategies, influencing public opinion, and organizing human and material resources in ways that might help to resolve the conflict.

The more concrete definition sought to differentiate initiatives that intentionally addressed the political elements of the conflict from those that simply were interactions or dialogues between adversarial groups. Montville's terminology helped consolidate the wide range of exchanges between opposing groups that supplement, rather than replace, traditional (track-I) diplomacy. Track-II diplomacy would provide an informal, flexible, and unofficial venue outside of official negotiation circles to fill in the holes that track-I diplomacy could not address.

2.2.1 Assumptions of Track-II Diplomacy

While scholars have been unable to reach consensus on the actual format and design of track-II diplomatic efforts,¹⁰ such efforts share certain basic underlying assumptions. First, track-II efforts are based on the fundamental belief that interactions between the adversarial groups in an unofficial setting will help improve relations between the two parties. Particularly in cases of intractability, violence and heightened tension usually lead to a complete interruption of formal lines of communication. Restrictions in

¹⁰ According to Jones (2008a), a significant debate actually exists amongst scholars whether a "generic" model of track-II diplomacy should be established at all. Burton and Sandhole (1986) argue that a generic model of track-II diplomacy should be developed to allow for learning and practical purposes in various conflict settings, while Avurch and Black (1987) argue that nuances between specific cases makes a standard model of track-II diplomacy questionable.

communication could be a result of physical divide, but could also be political, social, and psychological constraints. A lack of communication between the two parties serves as a contributing factor to the dehumanization of the other. Informal meetings, theoretically, can assist in the breaking down of negative stereotypes and generalizations of the other side. As Chigas (2005, 140-141) argues:

Unofficial intermediation processes engage the psychological dimensions of the definition of the conflict directly. Participants identify underlying needs, values, and interests that are compatible and that can form the basis for a new definition of a common problem that the two sides share an interest in problem solving, and develop, as a result of deeper understanding of the other side's needs, a greater openness to abandoning previous nonnegotiable positions.

If such needs are identified, good will and reasonableness between the parties can be revealed and, according to Montville (1987, 162), actual or potential conflict can be resolved “by appealing to common human capabilities.”

The second assumption, articulated by Cuhadar (2009, 641), is that “the improved relations and jointly formulated ideas are transferred and incorporated into the society and/or the official policymaking processes, thus, having an impact at a larger scale.” In other words, the initiative's ultimate goal is not to exclusively address the one-on-one relationship between participants of the track-II meeting, but to have implications for the larger dynamics of the conflict.¹¹ This can be accomplished in several ways. Ball et al. (2006, 179), for example, argue that track-II diplomacy can best serve as a mechanism for the development of policy advice to governments: “New concepts or specified proposals can be debated in an atmosphere within which governments are not committed...In a sense, track-II, if accepted by regional governments, can serve as a kind of reserve of intellectual capacity.” Gawerk (2006, 44) also highlights the link to the government institutions, writing that track-II diplomacy can lead to “ideas and

¹¹ A key distinction between track-II diplomacy and other forms of peacebuilding is its intention to link to traditional track-I processes. Saunders (1991, 50), for example, argues that if the objective of participants is solely to “get to know the other side” through cultural exchanges, this should be distinguished as “people-to-people” diplomacy rather than track-II diplomacy. Such activities aim to develop personal experiences with one's adversaries rather than to intentionally discuss issues facing each party.

insights that can be incorporated into the official governmental process and it provides space for discussions on how to viably improve the communication between the governments and/or parties.” Other scholars point to the instrumental use of track-II diplomacy in affecting wider public opinion on peace processes. Montville (1987, 162), for example, argues that track-II diplomacy “seeks to promote an environment in a political community, through the education of public opinion, that would make it safer for political leaders to take risks for peace.” Kelman (2002) notes that track-II diplomacy can encourage the momentum for peace by building broad public support, strengthening the political will for peacebuilding processes.

In order to address the range of opinions for how track-II diplomacy specifically is transferred to larger peace processes, Agha et al. (2003) classify efforts into two broad descriptive categories: “soft” and “hard” track-II diplomacy. At a minimum, track-II diplomacy aims to improve each side’s understanding of the other’s positions and policies through an exchange of views, perceptions, and information. In this scenario, talks aim to help participants familiarize themselves with one another, as well as the intangible identity-based dimensions of the struggle, in the hope of affecting larger public opinion. Such activities can be considered “soft” track-II diplomacy. “Hard” track-II diplomacy, on the other hand, refers to talks that help negotiate political agreements between governments. Participants talk about sensitive issues that cannot be dealt with in a formal setting between parties. Agha et al. (2003, 3) write that the objective of such “hard” track-II talks is to reach a political agreement or understanding that will be acceptable to the conflicting parties. These talks tend to take place in complete secrecy with as few people knowing about their activities as possible. While “hard” track-I talks aim to intentionally address specific political elements of the conflict, Kaye (2007, 7) points out that “even ‘soft’ track two exchanges are policy-related and ultimately aim to address and solve” key challenges between the parties.

2.2.2 Participants of Track-II Diplomacy

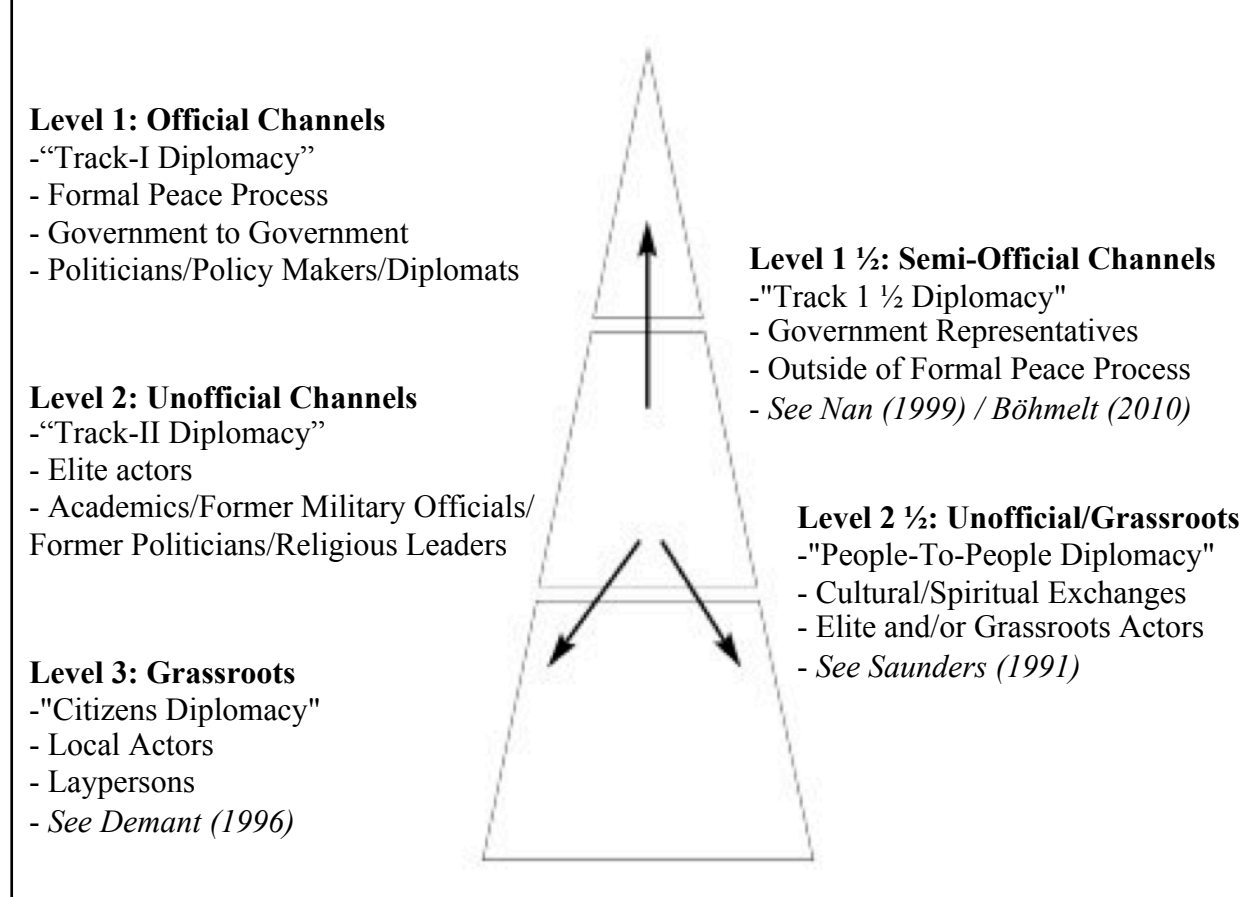
Given the assumption that track-II diplomacy is “to produce changes in the individual participants and to transfer these changes into the political process,” (Kelman 2002, 47) participants involved usually have certain characteristics. Most importantly, track-II participants are non-officials who do not serve a role in the government’s formal diplomatic structures.¹² They are often middle-level, civil society leaders with some form of access to decision-makers.¹³ Davies and Kaufman (2002) argue that such participants tend to have political influence on both the *horizontal* and *vertical* relationships of the conflict. New insights from the processes are communicated vertically to the top levels, while simultaneously horizontally communicated to other civil society members “to consider how they might help each other in moving toward settlement or resolution of the conflict” (2002, 6). Participants bridge “critical divides that complicate and often retard the process of conflict transformation ... [including] the divisions between government and civil society, between elite and grassroots levels within communities, and between different cultural worldviews and assumptions about how to manage conflict and change” (2002, 3-4).

Traditionally, track-II diplomatic efforts have included scholars, senior journalists, retired military or government officials, opinion leaders, or other politically influential individuals from conflicting parties. Agha et al. (2003) argue that regardless of their background, participants need to have certain characteristics and qualities. First, they need to be available and committed to the process. Track-II engagement “requires a considerable amount of time and effort,” (2003, 176) and a lack of it can compromise the exercise. Second, they must be willing to take risks or think beyond the

¹² Scholars such as Nan (1999) and Böhmelt (2010) have developed a concept known as “Track One-and-a-Half” to refer to unofficial dialogues in which all or most of the participants from the conflicting sides are officials or non-officials acting on behalf of their respective governments. They are usually very close to official processes, and such activities are usually held in strict secrecy. Such processes have also been called “secret diplomacy”.

¹³ Demant (1996) offers the distinction between track-II diplomacy and what he refers to as “citizens diplomacy.” Average civilians who are not in a position to affect the greater masses or public policy makers instead participate in “citizens’ diplomacy,” a process with its own merits and goals.

Figure 2.1: Situating Track-II Diplomacy



Source: developed from Villumstad (2002, 19)

government position. They write: "Track-II talks require challenging or bypassing official positions or articulating creative ideas that do not correspond with the established "common wisdom within each camp. Track-II participants must be willing to 'enlarge the envelope'" (2003, 176). Third, they need to come with some sort of generalizable expertise in their field. Agha et al. note that specific technical expertise may slow down the process with too much detail, but participants need to be able to speak with some authority in their field. Finally, they need to be prepared to use a problem-solving approach to their discussions. A problem solving approach "implies a non-ideological perspective and a readiness to acknowledge that practical solutions on the ground are not always fully compatible with longstanding ideological or political aspirations" (2003, 177). Participants must therefore "'step back' from official positions to jointly explore the underlying causes of the dispute in the hope of jointly developing alternative ideas" (Jones 2008a, 4).

2.3 Religious Actors and Track-II Diplomacy

While literature on track-II diplomacy tends to overlook the prospects of religious actors serving in track-II roles, a significant amount of research has been conducted on religious actors in other peacebuilding roles. Especially with the decline of the Cold War and the collapse of the former Soviet Union, scholars around the world have increasingly devoted academic attention to the question of religion, conflict, and peace (Little 2006, 95). Beginning in the 1990s, a sharp rise in the amount of literature on the practice of religious peace building indicated greater interest in the potential impact of religion as a constructive force rather than solely a source of violence and war.¹⁴ Sampson (1997) notes that religious actors have played active and effective roles as advocates, intermediaries, observers, and pursuers of transnational justice. Little and Appleby (2004, 3) echo this claim, noting that in many situations, religious leaders have been asked to “mediate conflicts, reconcile opponents, and assume a larger share of the responsibility for social welfare and the common good. Religious actors, after all, are long-term players who live among and often belong to the people and groups involved in conflict.”

Throughout the literature, scholars have thus highlighted the distinct characteristics that religion and religious actors have that could contribute to peacebuilding. Religious leaders, in particular, may potentially be in a significant functional position for track-II diplomacy for several reasons. First, religious leadership is generally able to access both the vertical and horizontal dimensions of society. As Villumstad (2002, 19) writes:

Religious leaders have direct access both to the grassroots level and to the top leadership level. Their access to the grassroots is through their own religious communities, or ‘constituencies’. Their access to the top leadership is through their representative mandate from smaller or larger constituencies within the larger community. Their strategic potential to make a difference in conflicts is considerable, and transcends different levels in national and international contexts.

¹⁴See Johnston and Sampson (1994) and Appleby (1996) for further discussion.

Second, religious leadership often represents the voice of collective identities in a conflict. Moix (2006), for example, argues that religion is a significant factor in what contributes to a sense of self and place in society. Since religion provides answers to most fundamental questions in life for many people, it often overcomes other identity factors in decision making. Thus, religious identity can either draw on extreme lines between in- and out-groups (sacred and profane, human and divine, saved and unsaved, good and evil, etc.), or it can “provide an access point for connection with parties in conflict to build trust and open dialogue” (2006, 594). Hence, religious leaders are “in a position to negotiate with reference to the normative system of the religious group, and may at the same time be in a position to issue altered theological interpretations of the normative system” (Harpviken and Røislien 2005, 22). Religious leaders speak on behalf of the larger, non-tangible identity-based needs of the parties and are in a particular position to address the collective identity issues “manifest in terms of cultural values, images, customs, language, religion, and racial heritage” (Azar 1990, 9).

Finally, religious leaders are able to bridge what Little and Appleby (2004, 11) refer to as the most relevant obstacle to many peace processes, namely the “hermeneutical gap.” In other words, religious leaders are often in a position to connect the larger normative worldviews of the religious group with what is actually happening on the ground. Religious narratives often tell the history of the region, the land and its peoples, and frame where one fits in the world in relation to other groups. Religious leaders exhibit an intimate knowledge of language of this religious framing, and have access to the long-term vision of peace for the conflicted society from a theological perspective. As Little and Appleby (2004, 11) write, religious leaders can provide an important interpretive framework for negotiations as they are “at ease with many actors and familiar with the language and issues at stake.”

Two areas of literature exhibit parallels to religious actors in track-II roles, but do not specifically entail track-II efforts: multi-track diplomacy and faith-based diplomacy.

First, given the theoretical and applied merits of track-II diplomacy, Diamond and McDonald (1996) develop the concept further by breaking down diplomacy into nine discrete “tracks” known as “multi-track diplomacy.”¹⁵ Track VII relates specifically to “Religion or Peacemaking through Faith in Action,” and it examines the beliefs and peace-oriented actions of spiritual and religious communities. McDonald (1999, 22) argues that the use of a multi-track system more effectively identifies nonnegotiable issues, and removes a traditional “hierarchy” of diplomatic models in favor of inter-dependant tracks that address different elements of the conflict. The difference between track-II diplomacy with religious actors and the religious track of multi-track diplomacy, however, is that Diamond and McDonald’s definition includes all activities related to addressing spiritual dimensions of the conflict. This does not necessarily include activities that are explicitly track-II.

Second, the broad term *faith-based diplomacy* was popularized by Douglas Johnston to describe unofficial activities “that integrate the dynamics of religious faith with the conduct of international peacemaking” (2003, 15). Cox et al. (2003, 31) expand this further to refer to faith-based diplomacy as:

Peacebuilding efforts rooted in religions—their texts, their practices, their traditions...Practitioners of faith-based diplomacy will, to be sure, draw upon secular expertise in conflict resolution and analysis, political science and philosophy, experience in national security, diplomacy, community development, and the like. But their central, orienting compass is their faith.

The aim of such broad incorporation of religion into international affairs is that religion can be made part of the solution to some of the intractable, identity-based conflicts rather than a destructive force. While Johnston refers to faith-based diplomacy as a form of track-II diplomacy, (2003, 31) his and Cox et al.’s definitions entail a wider incorporation of faith-based actors into peacebuilding rather than

¹⁵ The nine tracks are as follows: Track I – formal government-to-government negotiations; track II – Nongovernmental/Professional; track III – Business; track IV – Private citizens; track V – Research, training and education; track VI - Activism; track VII – Religion; track VII – Funding; track IX – Communications and Media

specifically track-II diplomacy. For this reason, research on interreligious track-II diplomacy could certainly be characterized as research carried out on one model of faith-based diplomacy.

Finally, while literature on traditional diplomatic channels and track-II diplomacy have tended to overlook the use of religious actors in favor of more traditional participants, some scholars of religion and peacebuilding have characterized interreligious initiatives as a type of track-II diplomacy.¹⁶ The problem with this characterization is not that it is incorrect – the problem is that the characterization rarely expands beyond an acknowledgment that faith-based peacebuilding occurs at an unofficial level with non-governmental actors.¹⁷ As demonstrated earlier, track-II diplomacy does not include every non-official meeting between non-governmental actors in a conflict. Greater attention and analysis is needed on the question of religious actors in explicit track-II roles.

¹⁶ See Abu-Nimer et al. (2007); Bagir (2007); Little (2006); Weinberger (2004)

¹⁷ Both Abu-Nimer (2004) and Harpviken and Røislin (2005, 16-17) are exceptions to this, spending some time expanding on characterization of interreligious work as track-II diplomacy.

3. Research Design and Methodology

In this chapter, I will discuss the research design and methodology used to address this study's research objectives, particularly highlighting the specifics of fieldwork carried out in early 2011. This thesis generally follows research methods employed by the social sciences, but is inspired by additional fields such as interreligious studies.¹⁸

3.1 Research Design and Strategy

As discussed in Chapter 1, this research aims to advance the state of knowledge on two bodies of literature related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (namely track-II diplomacy and the role of religion in peacebuilding) by addressing the aforementioned research objectives:

- 1.) to analyze the extent that current interreligious initiatives between Israelis and Palestinians can be characterized as track-II diplomacy.*
- 2.) to identify what Israeli and Palestinian religious leaders view as key possibilities, as well as major obstacles, toward a viable interreligious track-II channel.*

This research thus can be described as *exploratory*, or research that aims to investigate a specified problem for the purpose of shedding new light upon it and uncovering new knowledge. Schutt (2006, 14) writes that exploratory research “seeks to find out how people get along in the setting under question, what meanings they give to their actions, and what issues concern them. The goal is to learn 'what is going on here?' and to investigate social phenomena without explicit expectations.” While the first

¹⁸ For further information on how the Faculty of Theology/University of Oslo approaches the academic discipline of Interreligious Studies, see <http://www.tf.uio.no/forskning/omrader/horisont-dokument-english.pdf>

objective makes use of a deductive strategy by utilizing and testing pre-existing theory, the second objective utilizes a distinctively inductive strategy to discover how Israeli and Palestinian respondents view their world. A qualitative research strategy is therefore applied as the intent is to “discover the meaning that participants attach to their behavior, how they interpret situations, and what their perspectives are on particular issues” (Woods 2006, 3).

The design of the study itself is constructed as a *cross-sectional survey with case study elements*. In his 3rd edition of “Social Research Methods,” Bryman (2008, 44) notes that cross-sectional research designs are those that collect data “on more than one case at a single point in time in order to collect a body of quantitative or quantifiable data.” Cross-sectional research, in contrast to longitudinal research, is used to take a snapshot of the attitudes of a subset of a population at a particular moment in time rather than tracking changes in attitudes. Bailey (1994, 36) argues that a major advantage of such a design is that it allows for a large amount of comparable data, which is not affected by changes over time, to be collected.

The unique context of religious leaders the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, however, requires greater attention to the specific attributes of the leaders and their surroundings. Bryman (2008, 55) acknowledges such situations, arguing that a researcher often cannot generate findings in many cross-sectional analyses without reference to the special characteristics of the case being studied. This study therefore utilizes several case-study strategies to frame the data. According to Gall et al. (1996, 549), case studies are research projects which are constructed to “richly describe, explain, or assess and evaluate a phenomenon [e.g., event, person, program, etc.]”. Case study research allows for in-depth analysis of complex issues and allows for a “detailed consideration of contextual factors” of a particular case (George and Bennet 2005, 19). Case studies aim to provide rich accounts of contextual particularities, which is essential for analyzing peoples’ behavior and attitudes (Bryman 2008, 380-

387). The primary unit of analysis is Muslim, Christian, and Jewish religious leaders in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories.

The rationale for utilizing a combination of two research designs is related to the strengths and weaknesses of both. First, in an ongoing conflict like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, changes on the ground can quickly affect attitudes and perceptions of respondents. Since this study aims to identify key possibilities and limitations of interreligious track-II diplomacy overall rather than tracking particular events that influence fluctuations of perceptions, a cross-sectional survey best provides a snapshot of current attitudes of religious leaders. This allows for focus on the wider picture of interreligious track-II diplomacy between Israelis and Palestinians instead of focusing on isolated events that may trigger particular perceptions. Second, since this cross-sectional survey does not explore perceptions of all Israelis and Palestinians, and can undoubtedly be considered a *small -n study*, integrating case-study elements allows for greater exploration into the particular context of religious leaders. By including case-study features, the findings can be better situated within the wider context of respondents' lived realities.

3.2 Methodology

Over a six-week period in 2011, thirteen semi-structured interviews were conducted with religious leaders (hereto referred to as “respondents”) in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories, primarily in the Jerusalem area (see Figure 3.1). Selection of respondents was done through purposive snowball sampling¹⁹, primarily based on recommendations of local NGOs and the respondents themselves. For the sake of consistency and internal validity, “religious leaders” were operationalized as actors

¹⁹ Bryman (2008, 415) defines *purposive sampling* as a “non-probability form of sampling. The researcher does not seek to sample research participants on a random basis.” The goal of such sampling is to identify participants in a strategic way so that they will be relevant to the questions being posed. *Snowball sampling* refers to process of making initial contact with a small group of relevant interviewees, and then using these contacts to establish further contacts with others (2008, 184).

who were holding (or had previously held) leadership positions in religious institutions or organizations, and who were motivated and inspired by their spiritual and religious traditions, principles, or values. For the Christian and Jewish communities, identifying such actors was fairly straightforward due to the hierarchical structure of senior religious clergy. Identifying Muslim leadership tended to be more challenging due to differences in the organizational structure of Muslim religious institutions and communities. Thus, I identified Islamic leadership as Muslim actors who held (or have held) high profile, elite positions in religious institutions.

Respondents were limited to those who have participated in, or who are currently participating in, interreligious initiatives between Jewish Israelis and Palestinians living in the occupied territories (Jerusalem included). As a result, this research does not include the voices of actors who have participated solely in interreligious activities between members of their own ethnic group. Additionally, it does not include religious leadership in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories who have never taken part in interreligious initiatives. While a number of respondents stressed the necessity of speaking with members of religious identity groups generally not participating in interreligious efforts (i.e. Ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities, Jewish settler groups, Hamas), the scope of this research does not allow for their inclusion. Finally, religious actors who do not identify themselves as either Israeli or Palestinian are not part of this research. Thus, non-local actors who have participated in interreligious efforts in the region are excluded from the data.

While this research does not claim to have achieved a representative sample of the populations, special consideration was given to collecting data on a wide range of Palestinians and Israelis within religious groups. Interviews were therefore conducted with approximately the same number of Israelis (six) as Palestinians (seven), with respondents further selected based on diversity of denomination/religious movement.

Figure 3.1: Interview Respondents

Muslims:

- **Sheikh Mostfa al-Tawel** – Shari’ah High Court Judge / Secretary of the Shari’ah Supreme Judicial Council of Palestine
- **Sheikh Dr. Ekrima Sa’eed Sabri** – former Grand Mufti of Jerusalem / Chief of Islamic Supreme Committee of Palestine / Orator of the Al-Aqsa Mosque
- **Salah A. Zuheika** – Deputy Minister of Al-Waqf and Religious Affairs for the Palestinian Authority

Jews:

- **Oded Wiener** – Director General, Chief Rabbinate of Israel
- **Rabbi Levi Weiman-Kelman** – Head Rabbi, Kehilat Kol HaNeshama
- **Rabbi David Rosen** – Honorary Advisor to the Chief Rabbinate of Israel on Interreligious Affairs
- **Rabbi Michael Melchior** – former MK / founding member of Alexandria Process
- **Rabbi Jeremy Milgrom** – co-founder and co-director of Clergy for Peace
- **Dr. Ron Kronish** – Director/Founder of The Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel (ICCI)

Christians:

- **Patriarch Michel Sabah** – Patriarch Emeritus Of Jerusalem - Roman Catholic Latins
- **Rev Canon Hosam Naoum** – Dean and Assistant to the Anglican Bishop
- **Father Jamal Khader** – Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem

Out of the six Jewish respondents, two identified as part of the Orthodox Jewish movement, while the other four identified as part of the Modern Orthodox, Progressive, Reform, and Conservative Jewish movements respectively. Amongst the Christian respondents, two identified as Latin Catholic with the third identifying as Anglican. Further attempts, albeit unsuccessful, were made to interview respondents

from other Christian denominations. All four of the Muslim respondents identified as themselves as Sunni, the predominate branch of Islam found in the occupied Palestinian territories. Muslim respondents offered no further religious or political affiliation.

Interviews consisted of approximately one-hour meetings with each respondent, generally held at their respective places of work. Exceptions were made with two interviews that were held in respondents' homes. An interview guide with around 10 questions was administered for each interview (see Appendix B), but the interviews themselves were semi-structured in format. The semi-structured interview format was chosen to allow for greater flexibility and emphasis on what the interviewee viewed as important in explaining and understanding events, patterns, and behaviors (Bryman 2008, 438). Respondents were first given the opportunity to speak about their own experiences, and then questions revolved around three basic categories: the role of religion in the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians; personal experiences with inter-faith work; and the possibilities of political solutions to evolve from interreligious work.

3.3 Analysis

The majority of the interviews were conducted in the English language, with three interviews conducted with the assistance of an Arabic translator. Each interview was recorded, and was later directly translated and transcribed into English. A copy of the translated English transcription was sent to the Arabic-speaking participants for approval. Data from each case was subsequently classified and analyzed according to general themes that emerged from the research. Themes were identified as statements of meanings that 1.) run through all or most of the pertinent data, or 2.) carry heavy emotional or factual impact in the minority (Ely et al. 1997, 150). A content analysis of the data was then conducted according to themes, general patterns, and responses rather than individual words, sentences, or paragraphs. While the data provided a

countless number of intriguing themes, I have chosen to focus the themes deemed most salient in relation to my research objectives.

Interpretation of the themes and its relationship to the theory was conducted through what is commonly referred to as an interpretivist epistemology. In other words, interpretation and the search for meaning arose from the perspective of the respondents. Analysis of the themes remained very near to the empirical data itself to avoid over-generality or misinterpretation of the respondents.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Given the sensitive nature of conducting interviews with actors in an active conflict, special consideration was taken to protect the identities of respondents if requested. At the commencement of each interview, participants were asked to give voluntary, informed consent, administered both on paper and orally, in which they could opt to have their information anonymized (see Appendix A). Participants were able to withdraw at any point during or after the interview without having to justify it further, and participants could request to have portions of the interview left out of the final study. Whereas all but one of the respondents agreed to have their personal information and opinions published in the study, the analysis of the data sometimes is presented anonymously to preserve some degree of anonymity amidst the current political context in the region.

The study was reported to and approved by the Data Protection Official for Research at the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD) according to their guidelines.

3.5 Research Validity and Bias

Although some qualitative researchers have argued that the term validity is not necessarily applicable to qualitative research, the need for some kind of qualifying

check on the research remains. Thus, this research uses Woods' (2006, 4) conceptualization of qualitative research validity as seeking to adequately capture the meanings understood by the respondents. In order to maximize this, Woods argues that validity of qualitative research rests upon three main features: unobtrusive, sustain methods; respondent validation; and triangulation. First, when discussing unobtrusive methods, Woods contends that the researcher should leave the situation as undisturbed as possible. Special consideration was taken through the anonymization of the data, as well as through informed consent, to ensure this component.

Next, Woods argues that one of the best way of testing if the research has represented the respondents' correctly is to allow for respondents to validate their responses (2006, 4). As discussed above, respondents were given the opportunity to remove sections of their interview after the interview was completed.²⁰ Furthermore, the translations of the Arabic-to-English transcriptions were sent to the participants for validation. Finally, Woods argues that triangulation can serve as an important tool to maximize validity. Triangulation is the use of more than one method or source of data to cross-check findings of a social phenomenon (Bryman 2008, 700). As Mathison (1988, 13) argues, "Triangulation has risen an important methodological issue in naturalistic and qualitative approaches to evaluation [in order to] control bias and establishing valid propositions because traditional scientific techniques are incompatible with this alternate epistemology." While this was not always feasible due to a lack of previous data on field, the findings were compared and verified with previous research projects, literature, reports, and key informants whenever possible.

In order to address the potential biases that may affect the work, I strove to maintain a critical and self-reflexive mindset throughout the research process. According to Primeau (2003), self-reflexivity is a quantitative research strategy of self-critique and self-appraisal used to address the subjectivity of the researcher. Through self-

²⁰ Two respondents requested that particular sections of their interview be omitted from the analysis.

reflexivity, a researcher becomes aware of themselves in the research by continually scrutinizing “what we know’ and ‘how we know it’” (2003, 10). In other words, I aimed to understand how previously held positions and interests may affect my interpretation and presentation of the data. Given prior knowledge of the power discrepancies between Israelis and Palestinians, I intentionally attempted to serve as an unobtrusive data-gathering instrument through listening and observing rather than actively participating in the interviews. Additionally, I carefully monitored a number of potential biases of qualitative research identified by Woods (2006, 94): slant; unwarranted and hidden use of persuasive rhetoric; unwarranted claims to generality; use of certain non-neutral, loaded words slipped in unobtrusively; thin evidence to support strong assertions; and the researcher’s mind made up in advance/closed to other possibilities.

While it is impossible to be entirely objective in qualitative research, I was mindful of the propensity of my own views and interests to influence my interpretation, and I carefully considered these potential biases through the duration of this project.

3.6 Methodological Challenges

The study did encounter a few methodological challenges. First, political events in the region, namely the release of the “wikileaks” Palestine Papers, unrest in Egypt, Bahrain, and Tunisia, and further Israeli settlement building in the West Bank, dominated the news throughout the duration of this study. Several respondents continually referred back to these events throughout the interviews, and often were quite reluctant to depart from such topics. Given this tendency, a few of the interviews became much more structured as the interview commenced in order to gain insight on issues salient to my research objectives. Careful attention was given not to lead the interviews, yet this was a daunting task.

Another challenge was gaining access to particular religious leaders. Given the political sensitivities of the conflict, several religious leaders were reluctant to meet with an international researcher. Several respondents noted that researchers and the press had previously twisted their words in incorrect ways, thereby making them apprehensive to meet with a researcher again. On quite a few occasions, appointments for interviews could not be set up without a clear reference from another religious leader. For this reason, many interviews tended to be with like-minded individuals due to personal referrals from colleagues and friends. While this could be perceived as a serious limitation towards the validity of the study, respondents themselves identified the difficulty of recruiting non-like-minded participants as a key challenge for interreligious efforts in the region. See section 5.3 for further discussion on this topic.

In the case of the Jewish respondents, 5 out of 6 interviews were conducted with Israelis who had either North American or Western European backgrounds and had immigrated to Israel in their adult life. Only one respondent was actually Israeli-born. While this originally was perceived as a limitation to the research, one Jewish respondent verified that this might actually be a fairly representative sample of Jewish interreligious participants in the region. As he observed, the Jewish clergy involved “are almost overwhelmingly people who have made *aliya* from Europe and North America. In other words, the Jews who have a history of knowing what its like to be the minority and can identify what it must be like to be a Palestinian Muslim or Christian living in a Jewish majority.”²¹

Finally, a majority of the Muslim respondents to this survey generally were much more reluctant to share personal views on interreligious initiatives in the region than Jewish or Christian participants. More concretely, they generally responded to questions with very short, precise, and carefully worded answers rather than thick descriptions of their views. While their responses and experiences were certainly

²¹ Rabbi Levi Weiman-Kelman, Personal interview, Jerusalem, February 2011.

integrated into the analysis, a majority of the specific quotations presented in this thesis are from Christian and Jewish respondents. It is unknown if this pattern was cultural, political, or coincidental. Yet, some of the Muslim respondents undeniably appeared to be quite cautious, or perhaps even fearful, of their thoughts being openly published.

4. Toward a Model of Interreligious Track-II Diplomacy

A number of factors must be established in order to explore the extent to which current interreligious initiatives in the Holy Land can, or cannot, be characterized as track-II diplomacy. First, religion and interreligious activities in the Holy Land take place in a particular context. Without the contextual background of the initiatives, it is impossible to accurately frame the strengths and limitations of track-II interreligious initiatives between Israelis and Palestinians. This chapter therefore begins with an account of how both scholars and religious leaders in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories perceive the role of religion in the conflict dynamics between the parties (4.1). Next, utilizing previous research carried out by Landau (2003) and Abu-Nimer et al. (2007), I provide an account of the array of current interreligious initiatives taking place in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories (4.2).

Building from the theoretical framework of track-II diplomacy established in Chapter 2, I then continue by constructing a model for what constitutes “interreligious track-II diplomacy” as distinguished from other forms of interreligious initiatives (4.3). I argue that the initiatives must a.) include semi-elite religious leadership as opposed to grassroots actors and must b.) place special focus on the political dimensions of the conflict rather than solely spiritual dimensions. Finally, I examine the goals of the initiatives I have identified as interreligious track-II diplomacy to explore the extent that they are consistent with other traditional track-II models (4.4). Such an analysis is necessary to examine if activities that seemingly appear to be track-II diplomacy actually have an entirely different aim when involving religious actors.

4.1 The Role of Religion in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Scholars generally acknowledge that religion is not *the* dominant force in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, yet it would be an error to say that it is not a factor at all in the entire intractable equation. Religion is often cited as one of the numerous intertwined, co-dependent factors that contribute to the conflict's longevity. As Cohen (2005, 347) observes in his account of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the subtext of religiously-based perceptions and actions ultimately exacerbate the conflict's intractability.

In their volume on religious holy places in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Breger et al. (2010) suggest that religion and politics often undergo a process that they refer to as *coupling*. Issues of theological or spiritual virtue connected to one geographically determined locality, man-made structure, or natural object become intertwined with the *political* importance placed on that space. By calling a space sacred, one group essentially claims attachment to or legitimate ownership of it. In many cases, the "sacredness" of the symbol or space is elevated for political ends by exploiting the emotional intensity a holy place generates. The sacred space is utilized as a common denominator for the unification of a people, and also as a boundary line for who is excluded. In other cases, sacred localities serve as an "inexhaustible source of meaning and symbol of ethnic and religious identity" that parties are willing to fight and die over (2010, 4). Thus, for many Israelis and Palestinians, places of religious significance in the region, including the land itself, serve as "political theatre[s] in large measure because of the exclusivity that religious groups seek to attach to what they view as 'their' place," and simultaneously, to demonstrate who does *not* have claim to it (2010, 13).

The coupling of religion and politics is an unmistakable characteristic of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. While the religious dimensions of unrest in the Holy Land can be traced throughout the history of the Roman Empire, the Crusades, and the Ottoman Empire, most scholars focused on the contemporary conflict point to an intensified

manipulation of religious identities with the emergence of primarily secular Zionist ideologies in the mid-1800s. Zionist thinkers stressed the need for a homeland for European Jews in historic Palestine, articulating an historical, even theological, connection to the land as a means to acquire legitimacy.²² By 1947, U.N. Resolution 181 proposed the partition of the land into an Arab and a Jewish state, and European Jews began to define the boundaries of their new state based on Biblical interpretations of the ancient Israelites (Akenson 1992, 175-177). After the Six Day War in 1967, which resulted in the Israeli occupation of the East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip, the explicitly religious attachment to the land became evermore prominent. According to Bennett (2008, 174) biblically-minded Jews served as in the forefront of settlement movement in the West Bank and Gaza after the Six Day War. Breger et al. (2010, 7) note that Israeli government continues to “‘discover’ numerous holy sites in Judea and Samaria [the West Bank], all serving to legitimate and reinforce Jewish presence.”

On the Palestinian side, religious leaders have employed Muslim and Christian religious identities to rally popular support. Abu-Nimer et al. (2007, 44) note that Palestinian national leaders such as then-Grand Mufti of Jerusalem Haj Amin al-Hussieni used Islamic religious identity to rally support for resistance movements against British and Zionist colonialism in the 1930s. Muslim communities were called to rescue Islamic domain and the divine blessed land (*ard al-baraka*) from non-Muslim control (Breger et al. 2010, 6). By the mid-1980s, substantial elements of the Palestinian liberation struggle, a traditionally secular, nationalistic struggle, were employed using Islamist language (Bennett 2008). Political parties based in religious ideology, such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad, gained influence during the First Palestinian Intifada (Hroub 2000). By the Second Intifada, commonly referred to as the religiously-framed ‘Al-Aqsa Intifada’ due to then-Israeli Defense Minister Ariel Sharon’s public visit outside the Al-Aqsa mosque in 2000, scholars have argued that “the religious factor is constantly growing in the framing of the Israeli-Palestinian

²² See Bar (2010) for further discussion on the use of sacred symbols in Zionist movements.

conflict as an existential and religious-identity-based conflict” (Abu-Nimer 2004, 492).

National and political narratives, often framed through religious symbolism and mythology, continue to overlap, compete, and in many ways shape the political conflict itself. The lines between Jews, Muslims, and Christians become deeply drawn and identities are portrayed as zero-sum identities in which the validity of one group is perceived as a negation of the other (Moix 2006). Thus, as Abu-Nimer (2004, 492) observes, “religious identities (symbols, rituals, and values) clearly and crucially impact the perceptions and behaviors even of those Israelis and Palestinians who do not define themselves as religious or observant.” In other words, due to the coupling of religion and politics in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, “it is not a question of whether religion is involved, but *how* it is involved” (Khalil 2010, 47).

Muslim, Christian, and Jewish leaders interviewed for this study tended to agree with the prevailing academic assertion that that conflict between Israelis and Palestinians is not primarily religious in nature. When questioned if the conflict between the two populations was a religious conflict, every respondent to this study, with no exceptions, responded assertively that it was not. Respondents cited, among other things, national identity, self-determination, sovereignty, resources, and territory when they spoke of the origins of the conflict. Yet, even with such assured responses, every religious leader acknowledged that religion does, somehow, play into the conflict dynamics between the two populations. Three themes generally emerged to illustrate this.

First, the majority of respondents identified religion as a primary *source of identity* for both Israelis and Palestinians. As one Christian leader expressed, “Religion is essential in the personality of everyone here in the Middle East. To the Muslim, the

Jew, and to the Christian.”²³ Jewish participants tended to express that Jewish nationality, even for secular Jews, is tied to the Jewish religion, history, and culture. The Jewish national movement exhibited strong religious sentiments, and continues to embody strong religious connotations. Muslim leaders, while tending to articulate an attachment to their Palestinian identity as well, pointed out that their identity as Muslim is integrated into all parts of their life. All Christian leaders also cited their Christian faith as a key-identifying attribute of their community.

Second, some religious leaders articulated that religion is being used as a form of a *political instrument*, sometimes used by one party to justify action against another.²⁴ Responses varied as to exactly who was using religion to justify actions, with views ranging from the respective governments themselves to extremist groups on both sides. Respondents who identified religion’s role as a political instrument nevertheless articulated that such uses were contrary to the ideals of each of the respective religions. Several Palestinians referred to what they perceived as the intentional “Judaization” of the area by the Israeli government in order to claim legitimacy. Several Israeli religious leaders argued that Islamic extremists have used religion as rationale for previous suicide bombings against civilians.

Finally, a majority of leaders from all three religious groups articulated a concern that religion is becoming a *growing force* in the conflict, especially in recent years. While the conflict may not have originally started as one between religious groups, inattention to the religious dimensions of the conflict exacerbates and isolates those with strong religious identities. Extremist voices then fill what one respondent referred to as a “vacuum” that is left by ignoring religion all together. As one Muslim leader observed:

²³ Personal interview, Jerusalem, February 2011.

²⁴ The term political instrument is used to describe actions which are perceived as being done for political purposes but are not explicitly expressed as such.

Before 1948, during the mandate period, and even before the Ottoman period here in Palestine – there was no difference between Jews, Muslims, and Christians. They were working together; they were making companies and factories together. They were partners...there was no room for such a kind of religious conflict. It was never according to a religious basis up until, you may say, just a few years ago. Now we are witnessing changes inside of the Israeli community, and of course inside the Palestinian community, as people on both sides change the nature of the conflict.²⁵

To many respondents, the religious dimensions of the conflict are becoming stronger and more dominating, an issue that was commonly cited as problematic. As one Jewish leader expressed, “This [conflict] is a political one. Political conflicts are more easily resolvable than religious conflict. Political conflicts, you can compromise. Religious conflicts- it is much harder to compromise,”²⁶ indicating a perception that religious identities can be often interpreted as zero-sum.

4.2 Interreligious Initiatives in the Holy Land

Although it is apparent that religion often serves as a definite dividing line between populations, such a divide has not entirely stopped Muslims, Christian, and Jewish individuals from meeting with each other. Two research projects in particular, namely that of Yehezkel Landau (2003) and Abu-Nimer, Khoury, and Welty (2007), provide valuable knowledge on current interreligious initiatives being conducted between Muslims, Christians, and Jews in the Holy Land.

In his landmark study for the United States Institute of Peace, Landau (2003), an Israeli Jewish Rabbi and a well-known figure in interfaith dialogue, interviewed over 30 Jewish, Christian, and Muslim clerics, educators, and peace activists in the region to better map out the range of interreligious activities occurring between Palestinians and Israelis. Drawing on the personal testimonies of his respondents, Landau identified five different categories of interreligious initiatives in Israel and the

²⁵ Salah A. Zuheika, Personal interview, Al-Azaria, January 2011.

²⁶ Personal interview, Jerusalem, February 2011.

occupied Palestinian territories, defining them as grassroots peacebuilding, education programs, symbolic ritual, active solidarity, and personal grief/collective compassion. To Landau, *grassroots peacebuilding* refers to projects that bring Jews, Christians, and Muslims together to discuss their respective faith traditions on a non-leadership level. This can involve gathering of participants to share meals, discuss texts, celebrate various religious holidays, or inter-faith lectures (2003, 26-29). Landau noted that this was the most frequently occurring activity between the populations. The next model, *education programs*, are those that aim specifically at schoolteachers since their influence is primarily on the next generation. These activities include workshops with teachers and principals who are then “encouraged to bring a pluralistic awareness and commitment to their students” (2003, 29). Such initiatives aim to change attitudes regarding religion and tolerance, emphasizing that shared knowledge be transferred to schools and wider communities. Initiatives within this category did not necessarily include religiously affiliated participants, but instead focused on larger questions regarding religion.

The next category, *symbolic ritual*, describes activities that focus specifically on the spiritual orientation of participants. These initiatives combine “social action with spiritual disciplines like prayer and meditation” to offer integrated support to inner and outer peace (2003, 35). This can include meeting to pray, worship, and celebrate together. Activities in this category tend to avoid political activities to focus on collective spirituality. Next, *active solidarity* refers to activities that involve religious persons who focus on social and ethical issues facing both the Israeli and Palestinian communities.²⁷ This can include attending protests or putting on education programs concerning salient issues of the conflict, and it is often done through human rights organizations such as Rabbis for Human Rights. Finally, activities categorized as *from personal grief to collective compassion* include those in which different religious communities share their experiences with personal tragedy together in hopes of finding

²⁷ See Landau (2003), pages 38-40 for further discussion.

peace through joint grieving. These activities again do not necessarily require religiously affiliated participants, but aim to touch the spiritual reservoirs of compassion for “wide and powerful impact on public opinion through media campaigns, presentations at schools and community centers, and press coverage” (2003, 42).

The work of Abu-Nimer et al. (2007) provides a more nuanced approach to interreligious initiatives in the region. Conducted around the same time as Landou’s study, the team surveyed the various structures and themes of inter-faith efforts between religions in five Middle Eastern settings, including those efforts carried out between Palestinians and Israelis. Over the course of an eight-month period during the Second Palestinian Intifada, the team conducted interviews with forty-five active inter-faith dialogue participants in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories. They aimed to identify the goals, assumptions, and motivations of participants. The results of the study found that, in 2003, approximately fifteen different organizations in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories were founded on an inter-faith or religious framework. A majority of these organizations operated inside of Israel with an aim of Arab-Israeli coexistence. There was occasional engagement with Palestinians currently living in the occupied territories, but this was mainly limited to Palestinians in Jerusalem alone (2007, 79).

The research overwhelmingly found that the dominant structure of efforts between Israelis and Palestinians were what they considered “cognitive” or “doctrinal scientific” dialogue between lay people, a practice in which religious groups primarily *compare* religious traditions in an attempt to learn more about the other faiths and the nature of religion as a whole (Abu-Nimer et al. 2007, 53). This model assumes that change occurs through learning and understanding, and that misinformation and the lack of information can be significant causes of conflict and interreligious tension (Abu-Nimer et al. 2007, 220). Activities between Israelis and Palestinians tended to begin with interpersonal and group activities to break the ice and build personal

relationships, and would move to presentations on a given theme that was identified by the organizers. In the cognitive setting, the activities would deliberately exclude political issues or conversations about resolving the conflict in an effort to focus the conversation to solely issues of spirituality, religious texts, and rituals.

The same doctrinal scientific model also dominated meetings between religious clergy and theologians in the region. Exercises tended to focus on the difference and similarities in theological interpretations of religious texts rather than the actual relationship between the two groups. Each of the participants would deliver a presentation on an agreed upon theme, and the remaining participants would offer their thoughts in the highly intellectual setting. The apolitical interfaith encounters sought to emphasize harmony and positive connectors between the different religious groups or individuals rather than political differences (Abu-Nimer et al. 2007, 61).

When examining the work of Landau and Abu-Nimer et al., it is clear that there is no uniform model for interreligious initiatives in the Holy Land. It is evident, however, that a majority of interreligious initiatives place emphasis on a spiritual exchange rather than political discussion. Landau's categories of spiritual ritual, education, and grassroots peacebuilding arguably fall into the category of "doctrinal scientific" dialogues identified by Abu-Nimer et al. Focus is placed on the spiritual elements of the relationship in an attempt to bridge similarities rather than political divisions. The activities attempt to support peace by the dissemination of knowledge with participants, and hopefully with the larger public.

4.3 Identifying Interreligious Track-II Diplomacy

Given the wide range of interreligious initiatives currently occurring between Israelis and Palestinians, it would be a vast oversimplification to assume that all interreligious initiatives can automatically be characterized as track-II diplomacy. Each of the activities described by Landou and Abu-Nimer et al. have different goals, participants,

and underlying assumptions of how to support peace. Thus, one must examine the theoretical assumptions and goals of track-II diplomacy in order to identify which initiatives can specifically be considered ‘interreligious track-II diplomacy’ in contrast to other forms of peacebuilding.

As discussed in Chapter 2, scholars have been unable to reach consensus on the actual format and design of track-II diplomatic efforts. Consequently, identifying an interreligious track-II model is a more nuanced task than solely substituting religious actors into traditionally secular positions. One must consider the central goals and assumptions of track-II diplomacy, namely that:

- a.) the efforts must be based on the fundamental belief that interactions between the adversarial groups in an unofficial setting will help improve relations between the two parties and
- b.) the initiatives are built on the assumption “the improved relations and jointly formulated ideas are transferred and incorporated into the society and/or the official policymaking processes, thus, having an impact at a larger scale” (Cuhadar 2009, 641).

Building from these theoretical assumptions, I argue that two defining characteristics are necessary to distinguish interreligious track-II initiatives from other models of peacebuilding: the utilization of religious leadership and attention to the overall political relationship of the parties.

Track-II diplomacy assumes that participants have political influence on both the *horizontal* and *vertical* relationships of the conflict. Such a position aids in bridging the “critical divides that complicate and often retard the process of conflict transformation ... [including] the divisions between government and civil society, between elite and grassroots levels within communities, and between different cultural worldviews and assumptions about how to manage conflict and change” (Davies and

Kaufman 2002, 3-4). For this reason, participants in track-II diplomacy generally hold a somewhat elite position in society rather than members of the grassroots movements.²⁸

The same can be said for *interreligious track-II diplomacy*. In order for an interreligious initiative to be considered track-II diplomacy, it must utilize participants that represent mid-range or elite religious positions in society. In most cases, this would mean religious clergy or clerics who hold prominent positions in synagogues, churches, mosques, or religious institutions. Leaders are in a prime position to reach both the vertical and horizontal relationships in the conflict as they represent the voices of a larger segment in the society rather than solely their own. As Villumstad (2002, 19) writes, “Religious leaders have direct access both to the grassroots level and to the top leadership level...Their strategic potential to make a difference in conflicts is considerable, and transcends different levels in national and international contexts.” Activities that place emphasis on average laypersons with religious affiliation, but are not in position to affect greater masses of public policy, should not be characterized as track-II diplomacy at all. Instead, they could represent another field known as *citizens’ diplomacy*, which places analysis on grassroots actors, and has its own assumptions and aims.²⁹

In addition to the utilization of religious leaders in mid-range or elite positions, interreligious track-II diplomacy seeks to address the *political* dimensions of the interaction. Track-II diplomacy is built on the assumption that the ideas generated from the interaction will be transmitted into tangible shifts in policy through formal track-I efforts. Hence, track-II diplomacy involves “policy-related, problem-solving dialogue” in which “elements of the overall political relationship” or other areas of competition are explicitly addressed (Saunders 1991, 49). If the initiatives opt to focus

²⁸ Appleby (2000, 223) refers to the use of top-level religious leadership as the “elite leadership model.” This provides direct access to each of the religion’s resources of personnel and infrastructure.

²⁹ See Demant (1996) for further discussion on citizens’ diplomacy.

solely on “getting to know the other” through spiritual or cultural exchanges, they can instead be distinguished as “people-to-people” diplomatic initiatives rather than track-II diplomacy.³⁰

Using the theoretical assumptions of track-II diplomacy, as well as the specifics of the interreligious initiatives in the region, I will thus define interreligious track-II diplomacy as *unofficial dialogue of religious elites, focused on problem solving, with attention to both spiritual exchanges and the overall political relationship of the parties*. This theoretical definition places emphasis on the participation of religious elites rather than lay participants, but also stresses the necessity of addressing political components of the relationship. This definition also helps to distinguish interreligious track-II diplomacy from “people-to-people” diplomacy, which focuses mainly on a cultural or spiritual exchange on a grassroots or elite level, and “citizens’ diplomacy,” which focuses on the overall political relationship but utilizes non-elite religious actors.

One limitation of this theoretical definition certainly relates to the challenge of operationalizing what the “overall political relationship of the parties” actually entails. Especially in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the political and the religious elements of the relationship are frequently coupled, making it difficult to distinguish what is actually a religious question from political questions. For this reason, some of the most contentious religiously sensitive issues (i.e. holy sites, the future of Jerusalem, the status of the *Haram al-Sharif*/Temple Mount) are intimately linked with a myriad of political issues such as, *inter alia*, legal jurisdiction, access, archeological protection, property rights, tax laws, and minority rights (Breger and Hammer 2010). I will argue, however, that addressing the overall political relationship of the parties entails the discussion of participants’ day-to-day lived

³⁰ See Saunders (1991) for further discussion on people-to-people diplomacy.

realities (and perceptions of the conflict) rather than solely cultural or spiritual exchanges.

When examining the range of interreligious initiatives outlined by Landou and Abu-Nimer et al. through this theoretical definition, it becomes clear that the common assertion utilized by scholars of religion and peacebuilding that all forms of interreligious peacebuilding efforts are track-II diplomacy may be a mischaracterization. A majority of the initiatives in the region, in fact, can not be characterized as track-II diplomacy since they either place focus on grassroots actors, or avoid political discussions all together. The dominant model between Israelis and Palestinians, identified by Abu-Nimer et al. (2007, 53) as “cognitive” or “doctrinal scientific” model, is the most utilized model in the region yet cannot be considered track-II diplomacy. These initiatives place emphasis on comparing traditions to learn about the nature of religion and harmony between parties. Unless the doctrinal scientific dialogues are used as a form of trust or confidence building at the beginning of an initiative’s tenure, it must be understood as a different form of peacebuilding.

4.4 Goals of Track-II Interreligious Initiatives

Although a majority of the initiatives in the region are not track-II diplomacy, the aforementioned theoretical definition of interreligious track-II diplomacy allows for a great deal of diversity and flexibility in the actual format and goals of the initiatives that meet these criteria. Just as there is no “one size fits all” for track-II diplomacy, interreligious track-II diplomacy can take on a number of forms. Programs such as the Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel’s (ICCI) *KEDEM: Voices for Religious Reconciliation* project, for example, bring together Rabbis, Christian Clergy, and Imams to engage in interreligious dialogue and exchange views on core issues of the conflict. Clergy meet regularly over a pre-determined period of time to share stories and problem-solve together. Other initiatives, such as the *Council of the Religious Institutions of the Holy Land* (CRIHL), place emphasis on institutional religious

leaders and have no pre-determined time limit. The CRIHL meets regularly to promote mutual respect between the official religious institutions in the Holy Land, and has met with national and foreign political leaders on a number of occasions. Initiatives such as the *Alexandria Process* gather Israeli and Palestinian clergy in hopes of joint public action. The result of the Alexandria Process was joint declaration known as the “First Declaration of Alexandria of the Religious Leaders of The Holy,” calling for the end of violence and the resumption of the peace process.³¹

Given this diversity, it is vital to gauge whether the goals of interreligious track-II diplomacy actually resemble the goals of more traditional forms of track-II diplomacy, or if they aim to do something entirely different. When discussing the goals of initiatives that can be characterized as interreligious track-II diplomacy, four rather inter-related themes emerged: *bridging and humanizing; shifting the narrative to support peace; putting out “sparks” that might lead to outbreaks of violence; and instigating immediate changes in the political system.*

4.4.1 Bridging and Humanizing

For many respondents, primarily Jewish leaders, an important goal and a regularly cited outcome of interreligious initiatives relates to the process of *humanizing* the other. Given the current political atmosphere, many respondents articulated concern over the separation that occurs between populations. Whether this is a result of physical division due to the Israeli separation barrier³², psychological barriers resulting from violence, media images of the other, or a combination of forces, a commonly expressed view is that interreligious initiatives can serve as a humanizing bridge.

³¹ For more information on the Alexandria Process, see <http://www.usip.org/programs/projects/alexandria-process>.

³² The term “Israeli separation barrier” is the official term used by the United Nations to describe the 709-kilometer-long barrier built by the Israeli government. See OCHA (2010) for more information.

Rabbi Jeremy Milgrom, founder of a track-II initiative known as *Clergy for Peace* and self-described independent human rights advocate, emphasized the urgency of religious clergy engaging in such initiatives in order to understand the other. Using the example of other professionals in the region to illustrate his thoughts, Rabbi Milgrom expressed that religious clergy may face even larger barriers than many other professions:

You know how separate Palestinians and Israelis lives are. They rarely meet as peers. And out of all the professionals, clergy meet the least. If you are a doctor, you use the same technology and work in the same institutions. You can meet in scientific circumstances since diseases see no barriers. But religion definitely has barriers! The clergy tend to be less articulate in the languages of the other, since our training is so focused on our own traditions – digging deeper into the richness of our traditions. We are perhaps the least equipped of all the profession to bridge the gap. Thus, we need to aim to make this bridge.³³

Rabbi Milgrom therefore emphasized that a key aim of his work is to build such a bridge. Muslim, Jewish, and Christian leadership engaged in inter-faith work become “self-appointed ambassadors” who reach out in curiosity and hospitality to the other, and who make the visible statement that “our faiths can overcome the animosity that is filled with violence and terrible things.”

Other Jewish leaders articulated similar sentiments. Rabbi Michael Melchior, a founding member of the Alexandria Process and a former Israeli Knesset member (MK), articulated his concern with the divide between the two populations as a driving force that contributes to sustained conflict dynamics:

The thing is, even though that we live in a very small area, even within the city of Jerusalem – we know nothing about each other! We have even less knowledge of the other than before globalization. You can live five minutes from each other, but on all sides – you don’t understand what ticks the other, what the other believes, what the historic and national narratives are. More and more people are ignorant of each other, and they are more open to believing negative stereotypes.³⁴

³³ Rabbi Jeremy Milgrom, Personal interview, Jerusalem, February 2011.

³⁴ Rabbi Michael Melchior, Personal interview, Jerusalem, February 2011.

He believes that religious leaders “no doubt” play a central role in propagating such negative stereotypes, and they thus must work to adjust such a sentiment within the larger populations.

Another Jewish respondent described a project in which Muslim, Jewish, and Christian clergy met over the course of a five-year period to discuss their lives and other pertinent issues to better understand what the other thought and felt. He experienced a wide range of goals and outcomes, but one of the most notable successes was the sense of responsibility for the other that emerged from the inter-faith encounter. He expressed his experience in this way:

Each side [Palestinians and Israelis] learned to recognize the existence of the other - the other's stories, feelings, and issues. This is opposed to what generally goes on in, let's say, Jewish society in Israel. The majority of Palestinians are mostly invisible. They don't exist. It is called denial. If we pretend they don't exist, they will just go away. But now...now I have MET somebody that I have known for a while. I now know what Palestinian leaders think and feel. I now have a responsibility. The same can go with Palestinians. Palestinian religious leaders- Imams, pastors - had never talked to rabbis before! They might learn that not all rabbis, or Jews, think the same thing. The rabbis have very different opinions!...They learn about diversity in the Jewish society. They learn how complicated it really is. It's not as black and white as the Tabloids say.³⁵

One Jewish leader who serves on the CRIHL emphasized the personal connection he *himself* had formed with other religious leaders. He recalled a moment when a Palestinian Christian bishop needed a favor from him:

The fact that we can pick up the phone...that he feels comfortable to pick up the phone and ask me to assist him in a, b, c, d, e...Like, ‘tomorrow we have people from the world leaders of the churches – will you be so kind to talk to them about the issues here?’ The fact that we have made personal relationships between the people...this is a success.³⁶

³⁵ Jewish leader, Personal interview, Jerusalem, January 2011.

³⁶ Oded Wiener, Personal interview, Jerusalem, January 2011.

He explained that the two continually send greetings to each other on holy days, and that the growth of their relationship can be compared to the building of a home. “If the foundation is okay,” he explained, “then you can build the whole building.”

While the majority of Palestinian respondents did not explicitly express bridging or humanizing as goals of their interreligious work, a few of the Palestinian Christians alluded to the process in other ways. Patriarch Emeritus of Jerusalem Michel Sabah, a Palestinian Catholic Archbishop, articulated that protecting *human dignity* is a key goal driving his inter-faith work. One way that human dignity can be affirmed is through seeing the other as a fellow human being, despite the separation. “When the enemy is no longer an enemy, and they are human person – *that* is success,” he explained. “The Israeli is not only an enemy or a soldier – but he is a human person who speaks very friendly and about peace. And the Palestinian is not an enemy or a terrorist – he is a friend that can talk about peace and justice.”³⁷ By seeing the other as human, Patriarch Sabah believes that we have begun one part of protecting human dignity.

A further sentiment articulated by a Palestinian Christian was related to the goal of addressing the ethical implications of theology. Father Jamal Khader, a Catholic priest in Bethlehem, reflected on an interreligious initiative between Israelis and Palestinians in which *theology* itself served as barrier to seeing each other’s humanity. His goal therefore was to engage the other in a way that would reveal the human implications of the theology:

That dialogue – even the theological dialogue – has a direct implication on the ground. And as we usually say, theology may hurt...the theology itself is harmful for the Palestinians. What you call sign of hope, or sign of the fidelity of God to his people - you read it over and over in many places – a sign of fidelity to his people means a catastrophe for me. It means millions of refugees. It means occupation for me. God and the word of God should be good news. And you are making it bad news to me.³⁸

³⁷ Patriarch Michel Sabah, Personal interview, Jerusalem, February 2011.

³⁸ Father Jamal Khader, Personal interview, Bethlehem, February 2011.

According to Father Khader, the inability to connect the ethical and the theological in the interreligious encounter could result in neglect of the implications of one's theology on another's humanity.³⁹ Such a response exhibits strong parallels with the "hermeneutical gap" discussed by Little and Appleby (2004). In the context of the Holy Land, respondents pointed out that religious worldviews often block the implications on the human person on the ground. Thus, a goal of the initiatives is to bridge such a hermeneutical gap in order for humanity of parties to be fully recognized.

Respondents tended to echo, with fairly accurate precision, the larger significance of track-II diplomacy as argued by Azar (2003) and Chigas (2005). As established in section 2.2, advocates of track-II diplomacy generally argue that intractable conflicts are prolonged by the denial and suppression of fundamental human needs that are not always tangible. Consequently, track-II processes "work directly to change the underlying human relationship and deals with perceptions, trust, and fears that fuel institutionalization and self-reinforcing dynamic that sustains intractability (Chigas 2005, 125). Muslim, Christian, and Jewish leaders highlighted their aim to break down such reinforcing stereotypes and misperceptions between populations. Especially in a political setting in which a physical wall serves as a tangible division between populations, one of the goals behind interreligious initiatives is to re-humanize the other. This can alleviate the fear and distrust that trigger hostile interactions between parties.

4.4.2 Shifting the Narrative to Support Peace

A second prominent theme that emerged from all three faith groups was the goal of shifting the narrative from religion being a destructive force to that of a constructive

³⁹ Father Khader's thoughts on the connection between theology and political movement resembles the many of the thinkers behind Christian liberation theology, a political theology which interprets the teachings Jesus in terms of a liberation from unjust economic, political, or social condition. For more information, see Ateek (1989).

support for peace. As noted previously in this chapter, several religious leaders in the Holy Land articulated a fear of the conflict becoming further “religionized” if it was not addressed. Many perceived that their respective governments were not willing to address the religious dimensions, arguing that this leaves a vacuum for groups who are generally perceived to be extremists to step in and control the religious narrative.

One common sentiment shared by a majority of respondents was that the collective narrative that religion is an exclusively negative force in the region contributes to continued conflict dynamics. This narrative is perpetuated both by the media, the public, but also religious leaders themselves. As one Jewish leader articulated, “Israelis and Palestinians are not used to hearing their religious leaders talking in that language [of peace]. They tend to talk in terms of xenophobia, and nationalism, and victimhood.”⁴⁰ Father Khader echoed the sentiment that the ongoing narrative presented by religious leaders is a major problem:

I do believe that many Jewish, Muslim, and Christian religious leaders aim for peace, but I am not confident that all of them are doing that. There is a lot of preaching of hatred...of war...of incitement. The religious discourse is a dangerous one, and it is not the best right now.... There are a lot of religious leaders with good will. But the voices of fundamentalists are much higher, and hurt much more than those people who believe in justice and peace.⁴¹

From Father Khader’s perspective, one of the goals of interreligious work is to alter this destructive tendency of each religious group to create a constructive space where religious leaders can express the importance of diversity and peace to the greater society.

Dr. Ron Kronish, an Israeli Jew and director of the ICCI, expressed his concern for the current destructive narrative in this way: “Around these parts, religions - typically Judaism and Islam – they are considered part of the problem, not part of the solution. The general idea, of course encouraged by the media, is that religions are extremists,

⁴⁰ Weiman-Kelman, Personal interview.

⁴¹ Khader, Personal interview.

like radical Islam and radical Judaism, and the moderate versions don't get any media and they don't exist in the public mind."⁴² To Dr. Kronish, this collective narrative does considerable damage if society does not believe that religious actors can serve as peacemakers:

If you were to go ask Joe Israeli in the street – can you name me five Rabbis that have spoken out for peace – they might be able to name one. And only a few people would know *that*. The thought of Rabbis, Imams, Qaadis, or Sheikhs speaking up for peace is an unknown idea in our public square.... In theory, if you could get 100 religious leaders talking a language of peace in this society – and on the radio – that might make a difference!⁴³

In other words, an important goal of inter-faith work is to change such a narrative since it may have an impact on larger society.

A number of participants more specifically raised the concern that the current narrative that religious actors are opposed to working with each other and to working for peace can have a damaging effect on larger track-I efforts. In particular, several Muslim, Christian, and Jewish respondents pointed to effects that such narratives from religious leaders had on the Oslo Accords of the 1990s and the 2000 Camp David Summit.⁴⁴ Rabbi Melchior, for example, argued that narratives from Jewish religious leadership directly delegitimized the Oslo process and contributed to its demise:

If you look at the Jewish side, you see the phenomena of the deligitimization of the peace process by religious leaders after the Oslo Accords. It was seen as being anti-Jewish, or against the Jewish religion. Especially in the national religious group in Israel, a very strong opposition that delegitimized the process and the people responsible for the process. This led to the things like the assassination of our prime minister. This was done totally out the group that demonized the people responsible for the process. That assassination had a great impact on further political context. The murderer succeeded at wanting to end the process, for sure.⁴⁵

⁴² Dr. Ron Kronish, Personal interview, Jerusalem, January 2011.

⁴³ Kronish, Personal interview.

⁴⁴ Several respondents spoke specifically about the absence of religious voices as one component of the Oslo Accords' failure. While further exploration of this question does not fall specifically within the scope of this study, this could be an interesting area for further research.

⁴⁵ Melchior, Personal interview.

According to Rabbi Melchior, the example of the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Itzak Rabin by a right-wing Israeli radical in 1995 provides evidence of the destructive force that religion has played in the conflict.

Respondents also expressed that changing the narrative could provide an interreligious safety net for political leaders to make difficult decisions toward peace, an instrumental function of track-II diplomacy argued by Montville (1987) and Kelman (2002). Rabbi Milgrom, for example, expressed that political leaders in the Holy Land consistently need to check to see how their religious communities feel about peace, creating major obstacles to moving the process forward. As he put it, “If there are politicians who have some fantasy of reaching compromise, and have to look over their shoulders to see where the religious communities are that are against compromise - primarily from those that think there is a divine prohibition between returning some land or working things out - this shows where religion is part of the problem.”⁴⁶ Thus, his goal was to change the narrative “to bring religion in as part of the solution” in the form of safety net. Rabbi Melchior shared the view that religious leaders can serve as a safety net for peace agreements:

I think that we need to reach a point in which all religious leaders involved can say, from a religious point of view, that we accept the political agreement that is reached – that we support such an agreement. We will give it needed energy. If [political] leadership do their job and finalizes an agreement, we will give it the backing and the legitimization. ‘This agreement is necessary from a religious perspective. This is legitimate. This is Kosher.’ Then everything will look different.⁴⁷

From his perspective, this is a necessary goal of interreligious initiatives and a necessary component of any future peace agreement.

In addition to the instrumental function of creating a safety net, responses in this category suggest a desire that interreligious initiatives address larger issues than just

⁴⁶ Milgrom, Personal interview.

⁴⁷ Melchior, Personal interview.

the one-on-one relationship of participants. Particularly, it indicated that a majority of religious leaders believe that the current narrative that religious actors only serve as a destructive force can have a larger, sustained impact on the conflict. This is consistent with one of the underlying assumptions / aims of track-II diplomacy that “the improved relationships...are transferred and incorporated into the society and/or the official policymaking processes, thus having an impact at a larger scale” (Cuhadar 2009:641). While these findings cannot indicate to what extent such a transfer to the larger society is actually occurring, it is part of the participants’ intent.

4.4.3 Preventing a “Spark”

The third theme that commonly arose amongst respondents dealt with the prevention of the conflict from escalating. A majority of the religious leaders articulated a shared sentiment that the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians currently is in a fragile state. According to the respondents, there is a genuine concern that a small “spark” might be enough to cause the entire conflict to erupt into further violence and bloodshed. If large-scale violence occurs, it becomes even the more difficult for political leaders and the international community to muster the political will and the resources needed for peacebuilding. Thus, one goal of the religious leaders participating in track-II interreligious initiatives is to correct the misunderstandings and immediate tensions that could act as a catalyst to larger bloodshed. As one Christian respondent expressed, “Religion is a huge power here in the Middle East. Either we can build with it, or it will be a torrent or volcano that will destroy everything.”⁴⁸

For Salah Zuheika, a Muslim leader and Deputy Minister of the Islamic Waqf for the Palestinian Authority (PA), a key objective of his interreligious work concerns the correcting of misunderstandings between parties before they erupt into chaos. When

⁴⁸ Khader, Personal interview.

describing his work with the CRIHL, Mr. Zuheika expressed a concern for the fragility of the current political conditions, and noted that religious leaders had a responsibility to respond to this fragility together. As he observed:

An important part of our interreligious work is to organize the relationships in this Holy place, this Holy City, especially in the sensitive areas. Because with just a spark, everything will be in flames. From time to time, we make a statement together or discuss certain problems. We aim to delete the misunderstandings between us here before they get bigger.⁴⁹

If the relationships between religious leaders are not organized in a way that works toward peace, the public can perceive misunderstandings with religious connotations incorrectly and destructively. While Mr. Zuheika expressed that statements alone are not enough to completely avoid larger conflicts, they can contribute to a shared vision of peace.

A number of Jewish leaders expressed a similar sentiment. Oded Wiener, Director General of the Chief Rabbinate of Israel, highlighted the particular position religious leaders had in the societies as rationale for why leaders should aim to work together. For Wiener, religious leaders have “enormous powers” in that they can choose to contribute constructively or destructively to the conflict. Thus, the assembly of religious leaders in the Holy Land plays a vital role in quenching potential eruptions of the societies as a whole. “Our thoughts are, on both sides and especially amongst the religious leaders, is that the situation in the Middle East is quite fragile. It is up to them [religious leaders] if they are going to put the area up into flames, or calm these flames down.”⁵⁰ By coming together to discuss the issues that are prominent and contentious, religious leaders can adjust the course of imminent violence or misunderstandings building in the societies.

⁴⁹ Zuheika, Personal interview.

⁵⁰ Wiener, Personal interview.

Concretely, Rabbi Melchior described a current interreligious initiative that brings together religious leadership, namely Orthodox rabbis, settler rabbis, and Muslims within the Islamic movements, with the specific goal of reducing or extinguishing potential “sparks” between parties. While the project is in its initial phase, Melchior expressed that such efforts are a necessity in the region. His hope is that the inter-faith task force can eventually go into regular conflict areas -- particularly mixed towns and villages of both Israelis and Palestinians -- to stop a clash before it begins. As he put it: “There are always issues that pop up here. We will have people who have big credibility go together, and they will try to avoid the conflicts before they blow up.”⁵¹ The goal of such an interreligious initiative would be to focus on the narratives on both, but also the pains that the other is facing, to concretely halt violence and tension from breaking out.

Two of the three Christian respondents also expressed an aim of avoiding imminent flare-ups when discussing their experiences in interreligious work. For one, emphasis was placed on religious leaders’ moral influence as a force that could help to shift the conflict away from looming violence: “Religious leaders have a lot of moral influence here. Either we ignite the conflict, or we work together for justice and peace.”⁵² The other placed greater emphasis on current fear and mistrust between parties and the responsibility that religious leaders have to respond to this: “People are threatened by what is going on - there is mistrust and separation between communities. Whenever there is a political announcement in the news, this flies quickly... extremism becomes the answer in both the Muslim and Jewish communities.”⁵³ Interreligious initiatives can therefore aim to treat the mutual misunderstandings between populations that often trigger extremist action.

⁵¹ Zuheika, Personal interview.

⁵² Khader, Personal interview.

⁵³ Rev. Canon Hosam Naoum, Personal interview, Jerusalem, February 2011.

Overall, these thematic responses suggest a goal that is not commonly cited by scholars of track-II diplomacy, and represents an interesting point of divergence from many other forms of track-II diplomacy. For respondents to this study, the goal of interreligious track-II diplomacy can be understood as a way of preventing the grassroots from contributing to further deterioration of the conflict. This also indicates that religious actors in the region view themselves as being in a particular position to affect change on a horizontal level (a discussion further developed in section 5.1).

4.4.4 Instigating Immediate Changes to the Political Situation

A fourth thematic goal that emerged, and one that was indisputably strongest amongst the Palestinian Muslim respondents, dealt with the goal of immediately altering political conditions in the region. Whereas every religious leader articulated political and individual needs that were of pressing concern for the parties, several leaders repeated that such needs must be fulfilled *hastily* rather than over a long period of time.

Unquestionably, Muslim religious leaders provided the most responses on this theme. For Sheikh Dr. Ekrima Sa'eed Sabri, former Grand Mufti of Jerusalem⁵⁴ and Orator of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the *only* goal of interreligious initiatives today should be to alter the current political situation for those living in the region. Reflecting on a previous experience with Muslim, Christian, and Jewish leaders, he expressed frustration that interreligious initiatives in the region are often used “as a lie to signify that everything is alright here.”⁵⁵ The rights for the people did not increase, and the situation instead deteriorated further. For this reason, Sheikh Sabri has halted his participation in interreligious initiatives, expressing that there is no point in meeting with Jewish leaders in the region unless the goal is to specifically “increase the rights and justice for the people.” Another Muslim leader in Ramallah shared this sentiment. Reflecting

⁵⁴ The Grand Mufti is a Sunni Muslim cleric who is in charge of Islamic holy places in Jerusalem, most notably the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

⁵⁵ Sheikh Dr. Ekrima Sa'eed Sabri, Personal interview, Jerusalem, February 2011.

on an experience meeting with rabbis involved in the Neturei Karta movement,⁵⁶ the Sheikh noted that interreligious initiatives must aim directly to address the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories to “alleviate the suffering of the people.” If the aim of the initiative does not specifically do this, then there is “very little to talk about.”⁵⁷

Similarly, Sheikh Mustfa al-Tawel, a Palestinian Shari’ah High Court Judge and signee of the Alexandria Declaration, argued that Muslim religious leaders have a particular responsibility to speak out against the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza during interreligious initiatives:

Our object [in interreligious initiatives] is to end the occupation, and have a free Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as the capitol. Our message to the people, as religious leaders, is to live in freedom. No one tells them what to do. They should live in freedom with justice for all.⁵⁸

The Sheikh continued by reflecting on the story Caliph Omar Ibn al-Khattab, a 6th century Muslim leader in Jerusalem who refused to pray in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre as it would set a precedent that would lead to the Christian building's transformation into a mosque. The Caliph declared that there must be freedom of religion, and freedom for all, in Jerusalem. Using this illustration as an example, Sheikh al-Tawel argued that a goal of interreligious work should be to allow for all three religious groups to live in peace and security, regardless of their religion, as “has been done historically.”⁵⁹

⁵⁶ The Neturei Karta movement is an ultra-Orthodox Jewish group that opposes Zionism due to the belief that Jews are forbidden to have their own state until the coming of the Messiah. See Jiryis (1978, 67) for further discussion.

⁵⁷ Personal interview, Ramallah, February 2011.

⁵⁸ Sheikh Mostfa al-Tawel, Personal interview, Ramallah, February 2011.

⁵⁹ Sheikh al-Tawel’s reference to previous historical periods of peace between religious groups in the Middle East represents a sentiment shared by a large number of respondents from all three religious communities. For many religious leaders, there was once a period in which all religious were able to live and be together. The imagery of such a “golden age” serves as a reference point for the work of peacebuilding.

Rabbi Milgrom reflected on a number of meetings he had had with religious leadership, verifying many of the concerns raised by Palestinians. In particular, he pointed out that the goal of the interreligious initiative changes when the two parties are not coming from equal power backgrounds. He described the challenges of pursuing alternative goals by using the imagery of two interreligious participants taking, but one of the participant's feet being crushed by a chair:

Imagine that I am Palestinian and you are Israeli in the inter-faith encounter. We are sitting opposite each other. You say to me, 'Well, I want to hear about your traditions. Christmas or Ramadan and all that.' And I say, 'Well, yeah but – excuse me, but your chair is on my toe.' And you, as an Israeli, say, 'No, but – tell me about the fasts in Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr and all that.' And I say, 'I can't because your chair is on my toe and it's killing me!' And then you finally respond, 'But we didn't come here to talk about that. We came to talk about traditions and liturgy and all that.'" The problem is - how can you ignore the situation, the oppression, there? Everything that is going on? We are not meeting as equals.⁶⁰

To Rabbi Milgrom, any other goals of interreligious work become quite challenging and limited if they do not address the immediate political issues facing the participants.

The immediate goal of altering the current political situation was not unique to, nor exclusively expressed by, Palestinians. Mr. Wiener articulated that interreligious initiatives must address immediate violence that takes place against civilians: "No matter who is conducting the dialogue, I think that our first goal is to condemn any terrorism in the name of God or in the name of religion. There is no doubt about it."⁶¹ Mr. Wiener noted that addressing the use of religion for violence against innocent people must be priority for all inter-faith projects. From his vantage point, it becomes nearly impossible to keep moving to peace if such events occur. Rabbi David Rosen, Honorary Advisor to the Chief Rabbinate of Israel on Interreligious Affairs, also articulated the goal of immediate protection for the Jewish people in the region:

Here [in the Holy Land], the interreligious dimension has an existential urgency about it that relates to the very survival of Israel itself. If we are not able to integrate as part

⁶⁰ Milgrom, Personal interview.

⁶¹ Wiener, Personal interview.

of the broader context in which we live here, then our future is going to look rather bleak. This environment is overwhelmingly determined by its Islamic identity. Therefore, there needs to be a dialogue between the core Jewish identity of the polity that we call Israel and the identities of the others around us. The need for this encounter is important in terms of building the fabric for our well being here.⁶²

One ultimate aim of the interreligious initiative, then, must directly relate to securing the safety and well being of those living in the region.

While the goal of instigating immediate changes in the political situation is not necessarily inconsistent with the aims of track-II diplomacy, most track-II scholars would argue that this might be fairly ambitious. Track-II diplomacy seeks to supplement rather than replace track-I efforts, meaning that the formal government decision making processes still must decide to change current policies. With the exception of the goal that track-II channels might link to the larger socio-political systems, responses in this category tended to indicate one of the largest limits of track-II diplomacy; namely that the initiatives exist in the same environment as the conditions around it. As Jabri (1995) argued, there is no way to isolate or remove the activities from the larger political and social conditions present in the system. They will thus be influenced by the social continuities around them, as well as the absence of a track-I effort. In the case of the Holy Land, several Palestinian Muslims and Christians articulated a sense of frustration that the initiatives did not do enough to address the current political environment, an issue that is further developed later in section 5.5.

⁶² Rabbi David Rosen, Personal interview, Jerusalem, January 2011.

5. Opportunities and Obstacles for Interreligious Track-II Diplomacy

One of the most challenging questions of a viable track-II diplomatic channel is the question of linkage back to the track-I processes. Since track-II diplomacy aims to supplement, rather than replace traditional diplomacy, the transfer of the contributions of track-II back to the more formal processes is of utmost importance. As Fisher (2006, 69-70) illustrates, “Changes in attitudes (e.g. more differentiated and accurate images) and orientations (e.g. increased trust) have to result in a perceptual shift that supports the decision to enter negotiations.” Realizations, strategies, and options that may have been developed in track-II channels must somehow be transferred to policy makers in order to drive the negotiation processes and other official interactions.

While track-II diplomacy aims to link back to formal processes, practitioners themselves differ to how this should be done or how to measure ‘success’. As Lennon (2007, 3) notes, success in track-II diplomacy does not necessarily mean “immediate policy impact” but instead can mean “enhancing the analytical capacity of participants” through open analysis and diplomacy. Kraft (2006, 8) echoes this claim, arguing that “track-II meetings have an impact that cannot be measured in terms of material results, such as a policy, an agreement, or treaty.” The impact, instead, is generally in the realm of language and ideas. For this reason, the identification a concise timeline and means for how track-II diplomacy ‘successfully’ links to track-I channels remains one of its dominant limitations.

The aim of this chapter, then, is to fulfill the second research objective, namely to identify chief possibilities and obstacles toward a viable interreligious track-II channel, by bringing forward a number of themes that emerged from the interviews. Since this paper does not aim to test whether or not interreligious track-II initiatives are actually *capable* of linking to formal track-I efforts, I will instead identify the perceived

possibilities and barriers for the viability of activities (i.e. the ability to grow, expand, or develop *toward* linking with formal channels of diplomacy).

This chapter begins with an account of perceptions related to impact on the horizontal (grassroots) and the vertical (political powers) levels of the conflict (5.1). In particular, I find that religious leaders in the Holy Land predominantly view themselves as being subordinate to the political processes and much more able to instigate change on the grassroots level. Next, I provide an account of the perceived range of discussion topics (5.2), finding that a majority of religious leader believe that the scope of topics in interreligious track-II diplomacy either is a.) already restricted, or b.) should be restricted. The chapter then moves to two sections related to the question of *participants* in interreligious track-II efforts. First, I offer an account of the apparent tension between the “right” and “wrong” participants in interreligious track-II efforts in the area (5.3). Second, I offer an account on the utilization of representatives of religious institutions in the efforts (5.4), acknowledging that such actors potentially have the best opportunity to permeate both the formal political structures and the grassroots masses but that they tend to experience the same structural constraints of formal track-I diplomacy. Finally, I include an account of the concerns related to the timing of the initiatives (5.5). The analysis in this chapter is presented by the main findings, followed by their implications, in order to highlight their practical and theoretical significance.

5.1 Perception of Horizontal Impact as the Dominant Role

While track-II diplomacy assumes that participants will have an impact on both the horizontal and vertical levels within a conflict, respondents to this study overwhelmingly viewed their role in peacebuilding as one most fit to influence the grassroots masses rather than influencing formal political channels.

5.1.1 Perceived Lack of Vertical Influence

In nearly every interview, across every religious demographic, respondents articulated a sense of powerlessness in affecting the dominant political processes. In some cases, participants even went so far to articulate that their role is “overwhelmingly subordinate”⁶³ to the political authorities, expressing that there is very little they can do to influence the opinions of political leadership.

Several religious leaders referenced the politicians currently in office, expressing doubt that the interreligious track-II initiatives would be able to penetrate the political thinking represented in the Israeli government and the PA. For Rev. Canon Hosam Naoum, a Palestinian Christian and Assistant to the Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem, the strong, non-negotiable positions expressed by the political leaders frame the extent that track-II participants believe politicians will accept their ideas. “People don’t trust that something good can come out of dialogues because the positions [of the government] are pre-determined. Nothing will happen, and people get discouraged.”⁶⁴ Rabbi Levi Weiman-Kelman, head rabbi of Kehilat Kol HaNeshama, noted that the current Israeli government would be too rigid to accept any ideas coming from religious leaders. “I am sorry to say this,” he began, “but the Israeli government today would certainly not be very open to suggestions from religious leaders....I don’t imagine we could have much of an impact there.”⁶⁵ Sheikh Dr. Ekrima Sabri, a Palestinian Muslim, agreed with this assertion, noting that “there is no relationship between the political governmental leaders and the religious leaders – the government does not take any ideas from religious leaders right now.”⁶⁶

For Rabbi David Rosen, ideas generated in interreligious efforts may not be able to pass through the dominant political processes. Not only are many religious positions

⁶³ Rosen, Personal interview.

⁶⁴ Naoum, Personal interview.

⁶⁵ Weiman-Kelman, Personal interview.

⁶⁶ Sabri, Personal interview.

appointed by political actors, religious leaders' are not in a position to challenge the politicians and their work. He notes:

In the end, [religious leaders in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories] are subject to the political authority and in some cases are subjugated to their political powers. To expect religion here to have a prophetic role, to speak truth to power or to essentially challenge the political structures, one will be disappointed. This is not the capacity of the institutional structures of religion here, to challenge.⁶⁷

For this reason, religious leaders won't necessarily play a "very critical role in actually bringing peace because they do not permeate the political structures."

5.1.2 Perceived Position of Horizontal Influence

While religious leaders generally agreed that they are limited in their vertical influence, they were quick to point out they may have a different role in peacebuilding. Rabbi Rosen, for instance, expressed that inability to challenge the political structures does not make religious leaders *irrelevant* to peace-related work. To Rabbi Rosen, religious leaders essentially serve as the symbolic representations of the fundamental identities of the parties involved. In sum, their impact could be realized by working with the grassroots masses in support for peace.

Respondents more often than not articulated that religious leaders have a unique potential to impact and influence their constituencies. Many stated that the role of religious leaders is to serve as an ethical and moral example to the grassroots communities, showing that they can act differently from discourses of continued violence coming from politicians and religious leaders alike. Others noted that they could provide religious values that encourage peacebuilding behavior to others. Patriarch Michel Sabah, for example, expressed that religious leaders' unique position as spiritual leaders in the society may be best suited for the horizontal level of the

⁶⁷ Rosen, Personal interview.

conflict. While religious leaders may not be in a position to speak against the political authorities, they instead “should be giving the values that frame political behavior” of their religious constituents.⁶⁸ Dr. Ron Kronish of the ICCI agreed with this claim, noting that “The Rabbis, Imams, Pastors should be teaching our people what peace means in the schools, the mosques, and synagogues...What peace means in our traditions, and how we approach the other.”⁶⁹

Nowhere was it more evident that religious leaders perceive themselves as being in a position able to affect the horizontal levels than in the responses on the goals of interreligious track-II initiatives. With the exception of responses dealing with instigating immediate change (4.4.4), all other responses highlighted a perception that religious leaders are in a position to influence change on the grassroots level. For those who described interreligious track-II diplomacy as a means to shift destructive narratives toward supporting peace and reconciliation (4.4.2), the key unit of analysis was the larger civil society rather than political actors. As Father Jamal Khader, a Palestinian priest, put it, “Israelis and Palestinians are not used to hearing their religious leaders talking in the language [of peace].” Religious leaders understood themselves as being watched and listened to by the masses. The same can be said for responses related to preventing a spark between parties that could ignite the conflict further (4.4.3). Many religious leaders viewed themselves as being in a position to slow down the conflict’s momentum and, if necessary, to pacify the masses. Using language such as “enormous power”⁷⁰ and “big credibility”⁷¹ to describe their position within grassroots movements, many religious leaders clearly perceived their ability to support a peace process on the horizontal level as a central characteristic of their role as religious leaders.

⁶⁸ Sabah, Personal interview.

⁶⁹ Kronish, Personal interview.

⁷⁰ Wiener, Personal interview.

⁷¹ Melchior, Personal interview.

5.1.3 Implications

The data suggests a surprising paradox: religious leaders in the region perceive themselves as having no power on a vertical level, but significant power horizontally. This presents a number of opportunities and challenges.

First, one of the most limiting obstacles is that religious leaders may avoid passing new ideas to political leaders if they feel that the efforts of interreligious track-II diplomacy will be unable to permeate official channels of diplomacy. Thus, track-II efforts will only operate with the hope that they can spread horizontally and avoid putting pressure on politicians for official, track-I peace processes. Second, a perception that interreligious track-II initiatives' work is unable to permeate official political channels could limit the range of themes that are discussed in an interreligious track-II initiative. If religious leaders do not believe that the dialogues will lead to specific changes, they may avoid discussing topics on issues they feel that it will have little to contribute (see the next section, 5.2, for further discussion).

The perception that interreligious track-II processes may not permeate the formal government channels seems to affirm a limitation of track-II diplomacy identified by Richmond (2001). Richmond argues that track-II processes can *only* operate under the approval of track-I processes or official actors. He argues that in situations where track-I negotiations are not simultaneously occurring, track-II approaches “become slaves to state interests, with all of their inherent legal and structural asymmetries; they may reinforce stereotyping and nationalism; and make actors more aware of the structure and political oppression they face in the current context” (2001, 18). For this reason, interreligious track-II diplomacy may not be able to operate at its full potential without both governments providing explicit or implicit indications that they will consider the ideas that are generated.

A possible opportunity, however, rests in the respondents' perception that they can indeed be agents for change within the grassroots populations. While many feel limited on a vertical level, they understand themselves as being able to pass ideas to their constituents and support peace. More attention and resources ought to be focused on how to best transfer the ideas developed in interreligious track-II initiatives to the respective grassroots religious communities.

5.2 Constraints on Topics for Discussion

While I have established that interreligious track-II diplomacy involves addressing the overall political relationship of the parties, respondents to this study do not perceive that track-II initiatives between Israelis and Palestinians are completely open for *all* topics of discussion. A vast majority of respondents articulated either a perception that a.) the range of discussion topics should be limited, or b.) the range of discussion topics is already limited.

5.2.1 Range of Topics Should Be Limited

A common theme that emerged, primarily by Jewish participants, pertained to the limits of what could practically be discussed in their role as religious leaders. A distinction was frequently drawn between the responsibilities held by religious leaders and those that are held by political leaders. Particularly, some respondents articulated that religious leaders might not have the right academic training necessary to discuss more policy-related topics since their training is as spiritual leaders. Dr. Kronish, for example, articulated his reservations about discussing issues that are too policy-focused. Based on his training as a rabbi, he would not feel comfortable discussing and making decisions on specific details of a peace agreement:

I jokingly divide the world between the lawyers and the rabbis – or the religious leaders in general. I didn't learn in rabbinical school how to write a contract, so don't send me to negotiations where I have to negotiate and come up with some peace treaty

between parties. I know *nothing* about it. I did learn how to give a sermon, and how to teach a text and tell a story. I can do that – that is what we were trained to do.⁷²

In his opinion, more policy-related discussion may not be appropriate topics to discuss during interreligious track-II initiatives since they demand expertise from other academic backgrounds as his own. “I am not a political scientist, I am not a lawyer,” he expressed frankly.

Three other Jewish religious leaders spoke in more detail about what topics do not specifically fall under their responsibility, ability, or jurisdiction. Oded Wiener, Director General of the Chief Rabbinate of Israel, expressed discontentment with the assumption that religious leaders should discuss specifics of a final status agreement between Israelis and Palestinians, articulating that a religious leader’s responsibility is not to make decisions on such matters. As he put it, “We don’t necessarily need to speak about the peace and the borders, it is not up for us to decide anyway. It is the politicians’ duty.”⁷³ Thus, topics in interreligious track-II diplomacy should instead focus on giving moral support to ideas which politicians are already exploring since “that is what the politicians were elected to do.” Religious leaders should instead draw their attention to common political challenges facing both parties, namely topics related to access to medicine and technology, and more moral issues such as behavior of young generations or divorce rates. By reaching a common vision for how to address such issues, Mr. Wiener felt that both parties could find a way forward together.

Jewish respondents were not the only group to articulate that certain issues were not fit to talk about in interreligious track-II initiatives, however. One Palestinian Christian noted that religious leaders should not try to “make politics” by political planning in inter-religious meetings. They consequently “don’t talk about what the solution should be: ‘two states with those borders, etc. etc.’” since “that is up to the politicians

⁷² Kronish, Personal interview.

⁷³ Wiener, Personal interview.

to decide.” Additionally, as discussed in section 4.4.4, several Muslim leaders articulated their limits for what should or should not be discussed when discussing their goals of the initiatives. Instead of stating that some topics were too politicized to discuss, they argued that the only topics worth discussing at all were those specifically aimed to increase the rights and justice for the Palestinian people. If the aim of the initiative does not specifically do this, then there is “very little to talk about.” As a result, the range of discussions on the table is not completely open since discussions must meet certain pre-established characteristics in order for them to be considered.

5.2.2 Range of Topics Already Limited

A number of divergent concerns arose from those who perceived the range of topics as already limited. A majority of Christians and Muslims, for example, felt that Jewish leaders were intentionally avoiding discussions of critical importance for Palestinians. Instead of discussing issues related to rights, access, and policy -- daily struggles affecting the lives of Palestinians -- Jewish leaders would instead ‘pass the buck’ and say it was up to political leadership to decide. As Sheikh Mostfa al-Tawel of the Shari’ah Supreme Judicial Council expressed, “We [Palestinian religious leaders] are ready to discuss topics related to giving Palestinians their rights. The Israeli [religious leaders] keep trying to run away from it.”⁷⁴⁷⁵

Sheikh al-Tawel was not the only one who felt that many Jewish leaders were not willing to discuss more policy-related topics. A number of other Palestinian Muslims and Christians also indicated a perception that Jewish participants were avoiding certain areas of discussion by stating that they were ‘security issues’. Salah Zuheika of the Palestinian Ministry of the Al-Waqf, for example, expressed frustration with the avoidance of topics related to policy on holy sites by many Jewish leaders. As he expressed it, “We [Palestinian religious leaders] have to try and try and try and try

⁷⁴ al-Tawel, Personal interview.

⁷⁵ al-Tawel, Personal interview.

until the Jewish leaders are open to certain discussions.”⁷⁶ When discussing access and respect for holy sites such as the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Mr. Zuheika voiced concern that such topics are avoided by Jewish leaders as soon as the term ‘security risk’ is uttered: “The Israelis, they put everything in security matters and that’s it - end of discussion. And this is a problem.” Thus, according to Mr. Zuheika, certain topics are off the table for discussion when Israelis perceive them as a security issue.

While Palestinian Christians and Muslims undoubtedly expressed a stronger sentiment that certain topics could be removed from the table if they were perceived as having implications on security, one Israeli Jewish participant articulated frustration with many of his fellow Israelis for avoiding issues since they are always “on guard for anti-Semitism”. When discussing his concerns with many interreligious initiatives between Israelis and Palestinians, Rabbi Jeremy Milgrom voiced that many of his Jewish colleagues are unwilling to discuss certain topics because they remain “pre-occupied with the history of anti-Semitism.” As he puts it:

We have set up inter-faith dialogues as a place where we [as Jews] are not answerable to the things we do. Marc Ellis has expressed this before, that Jews and Christians will come together so long as Jews are not responsible for the injustice of the Occupation and how Palestinians are treated.⁷⁷ ‘We will talk to you, but you can’t bring up the conflict.’ We talk about the past, the history of Christian anti-Semitism. But we are not answerable for the privilege we have taken or the suffering we are causing.⁷⁸

Rabbi Milgrom noted that such an attitude was a “big challenge,” and that it allowed parties to “continue to do whatever we want to do, whatever we can get away with.” Without addressing the challenge, it would be difficult to allow for equal partners in an interreligious setting.

⁷⁶ Zuheika, Personal interview.

⁷⁷ Marc E. Ellis is a University Professor of Jewish Studies and Director of the Center for Jewish Studies at Baylor University in the United States. For more information on his work on modern Judaism in the Israeli-Palestinian context, see Ellis (2002).

⁷⁸ Milgrom, Personal interview.

When reflecting on some of the challenges facing interreligious track-II diplomacy, Mr. Wiener noted that many Palestinian religious leaders might not understand the difference between a religious and a political issue when meeting with Israeli religious leaders. They may have instead misinterpreted the range that can feasibly be discussed in an inter-religious setting, and the extent by which Jewish leaders can act. As he described:

The biggest obstacle we have in our conversations, especially for Palestinians – no matter if they are Christian or Muslims – is that they are not always aware, or they perceive that there is a very thin line between religious leaders and political leaders. Many, many times they try to bring up questions of occupation, and territories in our conversations even though we are *not* the right people to address for that. They can't make the distinction between religious issues and political issues.⁷⁹

Mr. Wiener believed that there were more appropriate channels for addressing issues related to policy of the Israeli government, and that inter-religious initiatives should therefore focus on religious issues rather than political issues.

5.2.3 Implications

The dominating perception that the range of discussion topics is quite narrow, a view articulated by all three religious groups, suggests a number of considerable limitations concerning the transfer of new ideas into track-I channels. First, several Jewish leaders and one Christian shared the perception that religious leaders have entirely different roles than political leaders. According to some respondents, religious leaders lack the formal legal and political training often necessary for policy making. They should therefore not be expected to discuss or come to a conclusion on such topics, especially if their ideas will not permeate formal political structures (see section 5.1.1). In the words of Dr. Kronish, “don’t send me to negotiations where I have to negotiate and come up with some peace treaty between parties. I know *nothing* about it.”⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Wiener, Personal interview.

⁸⁰ Kronish, Personal interview.

If this sentiment is interpreted as an honest self-appraisal of the roles and limitations of religious leaders rather than ‘passing the buck,’ the possibility for the initiatives to serve as a mechanism for the development of policy advice to the governments -- a concept argued by Ball et al. (2006) -- appears less viable. This is especially problematic for religiously charged, politically coupled issues such as holy sites. While a majority of respondents articulated that religious leaders will have a role in future agreements related to access to holy sites, they never-the-less argue that it is not within their range of academic and spiritual training to set policy on it.

The perception that certain discussion should be left off the table suggests another possible limitation of interreligious track-II diplomacy: instead of serving as a channel to address issues neglected by track-I diplomacy, interreligious track-II diplomacy may instead reinforce conflict dynamics by avoiding salient concerns of the parties. More concretely, if one party continually determines what issues should be considered relevant and what are not, this could reinforce many of the power dynamics already present between Israelis and Palestinians. Certain participants may feel that their needs are ignored in both formal and informal channels, contributing to the belief that there are no partners left to address salient concerns. Abu-Nimer warns of such a reinforcing dynamic, noting that an imbalance of power in the dialogue room can severely undermine the effectiveness of an interfaith dialogue process (2002, 21).

One area of unique possibility, however, relates to the apparent divergent definitions of *what* actually constitutes the “overall political relationship of the parties”. As discussed previously in Chapter 4, it was quite clear from the interviews that the *coupling* of religion and politics, a term utilized by Breger et al. (2010), was a definite feature of the conflict dynamics. When religious leaders entered into an interreligious track-II effort, many of them spoke from different experiences of what was political, what was religious, and what religious leaders should discuss altogether. Each participant arrived with a different interpretation, and a seemingly different conceptual language, of what should or should not be considered as a religious issue for

discussion. While some respondents believed that political relationship between parties implied policies set by governments, other respondents believed this implied questions of spirituality or morality.

Tension between what is religious and what is political, especially when it comes to sensitive issues such as Jerusalem and holy sites, is also a characteristic of the larger conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. Consequently, interreligious track-II diplomacy could serve as a mechanism for untangling the nuances for what issues between parties can be considered religious, what issues are political, or what issues are combinations of the two. A deeper understanding of where the two meet, and where the two concepts are entirely different, could serve a valuable role in future policy-making.

5.3 The Conundrum of “Right” and “Wrong” Participants

For many track-II diplomacy scholars, the *participants* involved in track-II initiatives can be of critical importance for the effectiveness and transfer of ideas into formal channels. As discussed in section 2.2.2, track-II participants share a number of ideal characteristics that “make a vital difference in facilitating or compromising the success of a [track-II] exercise” (Agha et al. 2003, 176). While this study does not test whether the respondents surveyed fulfill each and every one of these ideal characteristics, it did reveal that religious leaders in the Holy Land perceived involvement by certain participants as playing a big role in the success of the effort. In particular, respondents articulated a perceived tension concerning a.) the inclusion of solely the ‘right’ participants (moderates who share a common vision for communication) if they do not have the necessary horizontal/vertical influence, and b.) the exclusion of the ‘wrong’ participants (hard-lined voices who may not be willing to cooperate) if they may be better positioned to make an impact.

5.3.1 “Preaching to the Converts”

One commonly cited concern voiced by Christian and Jewish respondents pertained to the utilization of participants who are willing to talk (the ‘right’ participants) but may not represent the views or demographics of the wider populations. In particular, respondents raised the concern that a majority of the interreligious initiatives in the region utilize the same like-minded participants every time. When reflecting on his experiences, Father Khader discussed his perceptions that the only people who attend interreligious initiatives are those that either already believe in its value or are employed to be there. From his perspective, such initiatives can only do so much to support larger peace processes since the initiatives are “preaching to the converts” – or those people who already have decided that the meeting has value. Moreover, such participants may not represent the larger views of the populations:

My perception is that we are preaching to the converts – those that already believe in the process. We have dialogue with people who are professional in dialogue, for example. They are able to *live* because of dialogue. They have their own NGOs for promoting such efforts. The important question, however, is how to reach for those who do not believe in dialogue, or who do not care. Usually, the majority is not interested. The minority is more interested in dialogue.⁸¹

Khader expressed concern that the impact of the initiative on the wider population will be limited if only a small number of the same people are involved every time.

Rabbi Weiman-Kelman articulated a similar concern, describing a “high level of frustration” with trying to find new participants to interreligious initiatives. While discussing his 30 years of experience in interreligious work, he acknowledged that one major challenge is the recruitment of new participants who do not already believe in the value of the meeting. While the current participants were admittedly “good people,” he expressed that “you pretty much always know who is going to show up at

⁸¹ Khader, Personal interview.

these things.”⁸² If the same like-minded people attend every time, the likelihood that new ideas can be generated and transferred becomes reduced. As Rabbi Weiman-Kelman put it, “it’s an unrealistic expectation that the same people [meeting every time] will have new ideas.” The task then is to recruit people who might represent the voices of the larger population rather than the limited few who already want to be together.

While discussing his role on the CRIHL, Mr. Wiener also acknowledged the challenge of coming up with new ideas when the pool of participants is limited. Mr. Wiener acknowledged that “each of us [religious leaders] already have our own opinions, fixed opinions, that we won’t change too much.”⁸³ According to Mr. Wiener, those who are involved have already decided that they want to be there. Thus, even more attention must be placed to expanding the pool of participants beyond those who are already in the system. This can be done currently, and especially with focus on the next generation.

5.3.2 The Absence of Certain Parties

Reversely, some respondents discussed the implications of excluding the ‘wrong’ participants who might actually be in a better position to influence the vertical and horizontal levels of the conflict. When describing a series of Swiss and Norwegian-sponsored interreligious initiatives that took place in the 1990s and early 2000s, Rabbi Michael Melchior articulated concern with solely utilizing like-minded participations. According to Rabbi Melchior, the Palestinian and Israeli participants in interreligious efforts embodied the minority of the populations at the time (“the very left of the Israelis and the very left of the Palestinians”⁸⁴). They were already committed to peacebuilding efforts. If such initiatives hoped to link back to the larger peace efforts,

⁸² Weiman-Kelman, Personal interview.

⁸³ Wiener, Personal interview.

⁸⁴ Melchior, Personal interview.

Rabbi Melchior argued that more attention must be placed on those groups who are skeptical or against the peacebuilding efforts. In particular, more attention must be given to those groups that may see peace against their religious legitimization:

Having a serious dialogue with the ultimate leadership of the Islamic movements – including the political parties like the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas, and Jihad – together with parts of the Israeli religious leadership, to see if it is possible to create a religious peace between the religious which will give the legitimization for political peace. I think this is crucial.⁸⁵

Thus, for Rabbi Melchior, greater attention should be placed on the parties that traditionally are not involved in interreligious initiatives if it is to have an impact on the larger track-I processes.

While two other Jewish leaders, one Christian leader, and one Muslim leader shared a similar sentiment, not all of the respondents felt that the absence of certain parties was a negative thing. Patriarch Sabah, for example, argued that the priority of interreligious initiatives should be to include parties willing to cooperate. The presence of hard-line parties might limit the extent to what could be discussed. The presence of parties that are perceived as extremists could also be perceived as superficial:

There are people who don't want to dialogue. So far, their positions are not for dialogue. They don't want to meet. Hamas will not meet with the Settlers. The Settlers will not meet with Hamas. The thing is, so far with more moderate people – we do not make so much process. To speak with less moderate people, we will make less progress. It will be just a show. To have a show - a dialogue just to say we meet – it is useless. It is cheating the public opinion. You are making it up!⁸⁶

According to Patriarch Sabah, the presence of such parties or individuals would give an erroneous outward appearance that all parties can work together when this may not

⁸⁵ Melchior, Personal interview.

⁸⁶ Sabah, Personal interview.

be the case. Therefore, the *absence* of such parties may be more conducive to progress in the initiatives.

5.3.3 Implications

The tension between having the ‘right’ participants who are willing to meet and share in problem-solving activities, and the recognition that they might not have the adequate connections to the vertical and horizontal levels of the conflict as more hard-line, ‘wrong’ candidates, is one commonly cited limitation of track-II diplomacy. In her study of security-related track-II efforts in the Middle East and South Asia, Kaye (2005) found that the tension between the “right and wrong” participants is common on an elite level. According to Kaye (2005, 25), “two common problems emerge at the elite level: dialogues include the ‘wrong’ type of people or they include the ‘right’ type of people with limited influence on official policy and little legitimacy in their domestic environments.” This conundrum is one of the largest limitations of track-II diplomacy as it can indeed play a major role in ability of new ideas to transfer both vertically and horizontally. Kaye (2005, 26) writes that one of the never ending challenges of track-II dialogues is to “find a core group including the ‘right’ type of individuals who also have influence and represent a broad spectrum of constituencies back at home.”

In the case of interreligious track-II initiatives between Israelis and Palestinians, the task of broadening the field to include new voices remains a challenge. Parties like the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas, the Israeli settler movement, and the Ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities represent large portions of Israeli and Palestinian societies⁸⁷, but little evidence suggest that they participate in interreligious efforts. Without further scrutiny on the impact that including (or excluding) such parties could have on the

⁸⁷ See Cincotta (2011) and Cohen (2005, 351) for further discussion.

generation, transfer, or acceptance of jointly developed ideas, a key puzzle still remains.

5.4 Formal Track-I Dynamics with the Heads of Religious Institutions

Another particularly prominent theme that emerged from respondents dealt with the perceived drawbacks and strengths of engaging the heads of *religious institutions* in various interreligious initiatives. A religious institution can be described as an establishment, organization, or association initiated to advance or promote religious purposes or beliefs. These institutions represent constituents greater than just a local congregation, synagogue, or mosque. In Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories, leaders of several of the highest official religious authorities are involved in interreligious initiatives, and a few of such institutions are linked to either the State of Israel or the PA.⁸⁸ Within this study, nearly half of the respondents represented a religious institution as its head, former head, or official representative to interreligious initiatives.⁸⁹

Advocates of engaging the heads of religious institutions generally support their involvement for two reasons. First, the inclusion of religious institution heads ensures continuity and longevity of the initiative if religious leadership changes. If one leader passes away or retires, another religious leader within the same religious background is able to replace them to ensure that the initiative continues. This is the case with the CRIHL, which assembles the Chief Rabbis of Israel, the Catholic and Greek Patriarchs and Anglican and Lutheran Bishops of the Holy Land, the minister for religious affairs in the PA, and the Supreme Judge of the Shari'ah Court (Khan 2010). Second, the heads of the official religious institutions in the region have both the legal authority

⁸⁸ Two examples of religious institutions directly linked to the state or state-like structures are the Chief Rabbinate of Israel and the Ministry of the Al-Waqf and Religious Affairs for the PA. For further discussion on how such institutions relate to the state, see Neuberger (1997, 100-112) and Shteivi (1997, 92-93).

⁸⁹ While all of the respondents who were the heads of the institutions participated in the CRIHL, their experiences in interreligious initiatives were not exclusively on this council.

over many of the most controversial holy sites while representing the spiritual authority of each party. As one Jewish leader expressed, “[the institutional structures of religion] essentially are the symbolic representations of the fundamental identities of the parties involve.”⁹⁰ Including such actors may provide the legal and spiritual support for decisions on religious elements of the conflict.

Respondents, however, articulated a number of constraints when including actors affiliated with official religious institutions. Perceived challenges were not only brought up by respondents outside of the official religious institutions, but were also noted by respondents who currently serve as the head of a religious institution, have served in such capacity in the past, or have formally represented such institutions in various interreligious initiatives. Particularly, two central themes emerged: a perceived lack of freedom from the religious institution itself and a perceived lack of distance from official government structures.

5.4.1 Lack of Freedom from the Institution

Respondents who raised concern that heads of religious institutions may have a lack of freedom from the institutions they represent described the almost “diplomatic” position each religious leader takes on behalf of their institution. Rev. Canon Hosam Naoum, for example, described his experiences of formally representing the Anglican Communion in the Holy Land to several interreligious initiatives. In particular, he noted that those who represent religious institutions must solely speak on behalf of the institution that they lead or represent. In some ways, this becomes almost a “diplomatic” meeting rather than an unofficial, informal setting:

Normally, in each and every entity – a diocese, or church, or mosque, etc. – there are certain people that are assigned to such interreligious forums or dialogues. These people usually have very diplomatic conversations and speeches – they are people that

⁹⁰ Rosen, Personal interview.

know how to speak, like Dennis Ross⁹¹ or something. If the person can't attend, someone else will be delegated to go in their place with the materials already prepared.⁹²

Rev. Naoum's comparison of religious leaders to diplomats continued as he noted that religious leaders generally come prepared with their institution's position, ready to contribute a pre-determined statement. Each religious group and religious institution comes forward with its individual positions, which "doesn't go as deep as one might like."⁹³

Another religious leader who has formally represented a religious institution, Patriarch Sabah, argued that religious leaders who represent institutions take on similar attitudes to politicians. Specifically, he argued that many religious leaders, like politicians, are more interested in remaining in their position of power rather than serving the people's needs. As he described, "Today, [religious leadership's] biggest priority is to keep their seat, *then* serve. The common good is in second place. The first place is to keep their position of power."⁹⁴ Patriarch Sabah noted that such religious leaders will never act in a way to upset their institution or constituency – constraining the ability to speak on behalf of themselves.

5.4.2 Lack of Distance from Government

Perceptions that religious leaders may not exhibit a distance from formal government channels were even more widely cited and discussed by respondents. Some expressed brief remarks about heads of institutions being "government employees"⁹⁵ or "subordinate to their political auspices,"⁹⁶ while others provided more details. Dr. Kronish, for example, noted that he has chosen to work with more mid-range religious

⁹¹ Dennis Ross is an American diplomat who has represented the U.S. in the Middle East under Presidents George W. Bush and Bill Clinton.

⁹² Naoum, Personal interview.

⁹³ Naoum, Personal interview.

⁹⁴ Sabah, Personal interview.

⁹⁵ Sabri, Personal interview.

⁹⁶ Muslim leader, Personal interview.

leaders since the heads of religious institutions “represent the vantage point of the state they represent. They are not independent bodies - they are all tied in to political stuff.”⁹⁷ Rabbi Jeremy Milgrom noted that the official religious leadership “rarely goes very far from what the official lines and policies of the government are.”⁹⁸ He argued that their actions and statements are generally tepid since they are part of the religious establishment rather than prophetic religion.

While discussing his own interreligious efforts, Rabbi Weiman-Kelman articulated his reservations with activities that mainly include representatives of official religious institutions. In particular, he noted that religious leadership on an official level might not be able to take risks due to their connection to the government structures:

[Religious institutional actors] are very politically beholden. They all have political agendas. I mean, I have one too –there is nothing wrong with having a political agenda. But they have *formal* political agendas. They belong to political parties and institutions that limit the range of interactions...Such political leaders are part of the general mindset of being stuck- they are not willing to take the risk that real leadership demands. A lot of them have connections to political entities, and it becomes a deep pathology.⁹⁹

To Rabbi Weiman-Kelman, religious leadership must be willing to “speak truth to power,” and those who head formal religious institutions may be constrained to do this. Their positions instead become the position of their governments.

Several religious leaders with experiences of representing a formal religious institution echoed these concerns. Patriarch Sabah pointed out what he perceived to be a critical limitation of religious leaders representing institutions. To Patriarch Sabah, religious leaders must be “fair enough, wise enough, and courageous enough to say a word that is different from the political leaders,” yet many of them are unwilling or unable to do this due to their position. As he put it, “The difficulty for the Muslim and Jewish

⁹⁷ Kronish, Personal interview.

⁹⁸ Milgrom, Personal interview.

⁹⁹ Weiman-Kelman, Personal interview.

leaders and authorities are that they are part of the political authority. They were nominated in function by political authorities. Hence, it is difficult for them to speak, even if they have religious and spiritual values that are opposite.”¹⁰⁰ In his opinion, many of the leaders are unable to step away from the government stance due to their position. Mr. Zuheika echoed this sentiment. He expressed his doubt that religious actors, Muslim, Christian or Jew, would speak beyond the position of their government, noting that it would be a move “against the interest of their country.”¹⁰¹

Rev. Naoum described one interreligious initiative with Israeli and Palestinian religious leadership in the Arab village of Umm al-Fahm. He vocalized a concern that religious leaders were unable to articulate their actual thoughts and beliefs due to their relationship(s) with the state. He used the image of a formal government official to illustrate:

If you talk to the religious leaders individually, you will hear a different speech from how they speak publically. I think this is because they represent the government [...] in these activities. Like take any figure – President Obama, for example. Maybe Obama has different views, but as president he has to do things the way he must do things. It is the same for the Chief Rabbis and other positions - they are appointed by the government. Even if they have their own views, they say what they are told to say.¹⁰²

Instead of having the flexibility to speak their own minds in an unofficial setting, Rev. Naoum expressed that many leaders were constrained by the state structures that their religious institution was related to.

5.4.3 Implications

The aforementioned concerns -- that heads of religious institutions may not have the necessary distance from the government’s position, nor the ability to speak in

¹⁰⁰ Sabah, Personal interview.

¹⁰¹ Zuheika, Personal interview.

¹⁰² Naoum, Personal interview.

opposition to their official institutional position -- indicates what could be two significant limitations to such interreligious initiatives serving as track-II diplomacy. First, the critiques bear striking resemblance to the same critiques offered by Saunders (1991) of *official, track-I diplomacy*. As discussed in Chapter 2, formal negotiation channels exhibit a number of structural limitations. Primarily, government officials are rarely able to speak separately from the government since their words will likely be perceived as the official government position (Saunders 1991, 51). They will therefore not stray more than a limited distance from the point of the view of the government's position and will likely not speak contrary to their own government. Additionally, the participants who hold a title in the government generally must speak on behalf of the institution itself rather than their own position, and are unable to quickly change existing ways of thinking due to the institutional constraint.

According to respondents in this study, strikingly similar structural constraints are present when the heads of religious institutions are involved in interreligious initiatives. Leaders of religious institutions may not be able to stray very far from the official institutional position, and often appoint someone to speak their prepared position if they are unable to attend. The meetings are very formal, and participants often assume a "diplomatic" role in that they are not able to speak openly and personally since it may be perceived as the official government or institutional position. Moreover, respondents perceived heads of religious institutions as being limited by the governments that appointed many of them. They are unwilling to speak against the position of their government since it may be perceived as compromising to the interests of each party. In sum, the formal track-I processes may be indirectly projected into the track-II channel. This potentially acts contrary to the stated purposes of track-II diplomacy as providing an informal setting where participants can discuss issues not addressed in more formal settings. There may not be enough distance from the government channels to allow for track-II diplomacy.

Secondly, and directly contradictory to the prospects of interreligious initiatives serving specifically as track-II diplomacy in the Holy Land, initiatives that include heads of official Jewish and Muslim religious institutions might not be characterized as track-II diplomacy *at all*. Track-II diplomacy assumes that participants are non-officials who do not serve a role in the government's formal diplomatic structures. While the heads of the religious initiatives do not necessarily act in the formal diplomatic structures, many are employed by or appointed by the Israeli and Palestinians governments. Although this does not necessarily imply that they are not free to speak their own opinions, it may limit participant's abilities to operate freely and candidly in contrast to the official government or institutional positions. A more accurate category of peacebuilding efforts might be "track one-and-a-half" diplomacy. Jones (2008a, 4) notes that *track one-and-a-half diplomacy* refers to "unofficial dialogues, during which all or most of the participants from the conflicting sides are officials, or non-officials acting under something approaching "instructions" from their respective governments." Further research is required to gauge if this characterization is accurate.

5.5 The Question of Timing

One final theme that emerged from the interviews, albeit the least prominent of all those highlighted in this thesis, concerned the question of the *timing* of interreligious track-II initiatives. Specifically, several respondents made comments related to a.) the extent to which the current initiatives are occurring at the right time at all and/or b.) how long will it take to reach "success" in the efforts. While responses related to this theme were certainly not in agreement, the frequency in which a majority of respondents discussed timing of the activities in some way warrants further investigation.

5.5.1 Should We Wait?

For a few religious leaders, timing is a key component to consider in gauging whether or not an interreligious track-II initiative can transfer ideas to track-I efforts. When discussing his views on the role of religious leaders in peacebuilding, one Muslim Sheikh emphasized that ideas generated in track-II efforts may be better received by politicians if they accompanied a formal track-I effort. More specifically, he felt that political leaders would not be willing to receive ideas concerning religion until a later point in an already ongoing peace-process. “[We are] going through phases,” he said, “and we are still in the political part. It is phase one. We have not yet gotten to the religious part.”¹⁰³ For the Sheikh, the political situation must first be dealt with before the ideas concerning religion will be received. Dr. Kronish articulated a similar sentiment, noting that the current political situation hinders the possibility for initiatives to make a large impact:

There is only so much you can do when the war is waging. When the war is over, you can do more. We can't do anything with Bethlehem, Jenin, or Gaza until the war ends, for example. We can only do little bits. We can build relationships. We can keep hope alive.¹⁰⁴

This view, once again, reiterates the perception that many religious leaders feel subordinate to the larger political issues, but also indicates that some religious leaders feel that their work may have little impact in the current political context.

For Patriarch Sabah, the current political context can be compared to what he refers to as an “open wound.” Politicians and grassroots populations will not consider certain issues, such as agreements on holy sites, until the political context has shifted. When reflecting on some of the obstacles of interreligious track-II diplomacy, he described the current political context in this way:

¹⁰³ Muslim leader, Personal interview.

¹⁰⁴ Kronish, Personal interview.

There are sensitive issues here. It is like a wound. You cannot heal it. You cannot touch it. You need to wait until the inflammation goes down. You need to wait until the trust is born between Jews and Palestinians. Until they trust each other and are friendly with each other.¹⁰⁵

In other words, he believes the impact of interreligious track-II initiatives may be better suited for a point when the parties trust each other more.

Other respondents also perceived the impact of their work as something that will not be fully effective until a later time, but instead emphasized the necessity to begin the work now to lay the groundwork for the future. Rabbi Rosen, for instance, discussed the impact of interreligious efforts in the region, expressing that the work will mainly have an impact “the morning after.”¹⁰⁶ At the same time, however, there is a responsibility to begin the work now. Dr. Kronish also indicated that the real process of working together will begin after a peace agreement has been reached. Yet, if religious leaders wait to begin their work until the ‘morning after,’ they will ask themselves “why did we wait? We have wasted so many years!”¹⁰⁷

One religious leader, however, emphasized the value of interreligious track-II diplomacy, but emphasized that another process should possibly occur *first* in order for the results to be more effective. For Father Khader, a key prerequisite for interreligious work is an *intra*-religious process. In order for interreligious initiatives to have the greatest impact in conflict resolution, religious groups must address the differences and challenges within their own faith traditions. As he put it:

We need internal conversations in order to promote just peace in the Middle East. There are a lot of religious leaders with good will, but the voices of fundamentalists are much higher. That’s why we need to have a Jewish-Jewish dialogue. A Muslim-Muslim dialogue. A Christian-Christian one. It is not enough for Muslims to say “al-Qaeda does not represent Islam. I have to clean my backyard first to reach a basic understanding of what is diversity, acceptance of the other, and the otherness of the other.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Sabah, Personal interview.

¹⁰⁶ Rosen, Personal interview.

¹⁰⁷ Kronish, Personal interview.

¹⁰⁸ Khader, Personal interview.

By first addressing internal inconsistencies and conflicts, each religious group can be better equipped to address big issues facing each other. They also can be ready to address the fundamentalists within each of their own religious circles.

5.5.2 How Long Until Success?

A second facet of the question of timing concerns the amount of time necessary to “succeed” in the efforts. Here, the data suggests an apparent point of tension related to the initiatives’ previously discussed goals. As noted in section 4.4.4, Palestinian Muslims most frequently viewed the goal of interreligious track-II efforts as altering the immediate political conditions in the region. Consequently, emphasis was placed on particular needs being fulfilled hastily rather than over a long period of time. The impact and “success” of the effort should lead to changes in the near future. Several Palestinian Muslims were left feeling dissatisfied and frustrated when such changes did not occur, resulting in one Muslim respondent quitting interreligious efforts entirely.

While some Palestinian Christians and Israeli Jews also shared the view that interreligious track-II efforts should aim to alter certain political conditions currently occurring, they more frequently discussed their work as one that aims for long-term impact rather than immediate impact. Rabbi Weiman-Keller, for example, expressed doubt that work being conducted today will have immediate political impact. It will instead take a considerable amount of time to see noticeable results. “At this point, we are going to need a lot of inter-faith and co-existence work to see results, and I am in it for the long haul. Not for any immediate political rewards, because that it not going to happen.”¹⁰⁹ Patriarch Sabah also expressed a view that a considerable amount of time will be needed to make large impacts. When discussing the idea of the conflict currently being an open wound, he noted that this wound may take a long time to heal: “[Palestinians and Israelis] will become more generous and objective to each other, but

¹⁰⁹ Weiman-Kelman, Personal interview.

this needs time. After 50, 60 years of peace, time will allow us to speak very concretely and generously to each other about the sensitive issues.”¹¹⁰

For Mr. Wiener, history shows that interreligious initiatives take a considerable amount of time to address the very controversial topics. When reflecting on the history of Jewish-Christian outside of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, he articulated that the impact of interreligious initiatives might not be seen until well into the future:

As I told someone earlier, the Catholic Church and Protestants conducted dialogue for 700 years. Only lately have they started discussing the controversial differences. After two or three meetings with a group Catholics [that I was involved in], someone who wasn’t involved asked me why would not talk about the truly controversial things of the relationship. I told them, ‘Well, it has only been three years now. Come back to me in 697 years, and we will talk more about it.’¹¹¹

It is therefore necessary to continue working toward a cause although it may take a considerable amount of time to reach agreement on the issues that divide the most.

5.5.3 Implications

The variance in perceptions concerning the importance of timing of interreligious track-II efforts is an issue that is still hotly debated by track-II diplomacy scholars. Jones (2008a, 6), for instance, discusses the tension that has emerged over determining whether there is an “ideal” moment for instigating non-official efforts or not, or how long the efforts should ultimately take. Citing Zartman (2000), Crocker et al. (2003), and Bartoli (2003), Jones argues that disagreement over if a “ripe” moment for the initiatives exists is still a prominent point of divergence within the field. While respondents to this study may not have offered enough evidence to support deep conclusions related to the timing of the initiatives, the diversity in responses indicates that interreligious track-II efforts suffer many of the same challenges facing more

¹¹⁰ Sabah, Personal interview.

¹¹¹ Wiener, Personal interview.

traditional forms of track-II diplomacy. It also suggests that different unfulfilled expectations related to timing might affect participant's experiences, and ultimately the viability, of interreligious track-II efforts.

6. Conclusions

This study has sought to contribute to the academic discourse related to track-II diplomacy as well as religion and peacebuilding. The concluding chapter therefore will revisit the findings and conclusion of the aforementioned research objectives explored in this thesis, namely:

- 1.) to analyze the extent that current interreligious initiatives between Israelis and Palestinians can be characterized as track-II diplomacy.*
- 2.) to identify what Israeli and Palestinian religious leaders view as key possibilities, as well as major obstacles, toward a viable interreligious track-II channel between Israelis and Palestinians.*

6.1 Findings and Conclusions of Research Objective #1

Conclusion #1: *The assertion that all models of interreligious initiatives can be characterized as track-II diplomacy, specifically in the Palestinian-Israeli context, is inaccurate. A majority of the initiatives might better be characterized as “people-to-people diplomacy” or “citizens diplomacy.”*

Interreligious track-II diplomacy is built upon the same assumptions and goals asserted in more traditional track-II initiatives, specifically in that:

- a.) the efforts must be based on the fundamental belief that interactions between adversarial groups in an unofficial setting will help improve relations between the two parties, and;
- b.) the initiatives are built on the assumption that “the improved relations and jointly formulated ideas are transferred and incorporated into the society and/or official policymaking processes” (Cuhadar 2009, 641).

Using theoretical literature on the goals and assumptions of track-II diplomacy, I therefore argue that interreligious track-II diplomacy can be identified as *unofficial dialogue of religious elites, focused on problem solving, with attention to both spiritual exchanges and the overall political relationship of the parties*. This definition emphasizes religious leaders being in the best position to transfer jointly achieved ideas to both the vertical (formal policymaking processes) and horizontal (grassroots laypersons) levels of the conflict. It also places emphasis on the necessity for initiatives to address political challenges facing the parties rather than avoiding them entirely, as is frequently done in interreligious settings between Israelis and Palestinians.

When looking to research conducted by Abu-Nimer et al. (2007) and Landou (2003) on current interreligious initiatives taking place between Israelis and Palestinians, it is evident that a majority of the interreligious initiatives currently occurring between Israelis and Palestinians cannot be characterized as track-II diplomacy after all. This shortcoming essentially stems from two reasons. First, a majority of the initiatives between Israelis and Palestinians are what can be considered “cognitive” or “doctrinal scientific.” Initiatives deliberately exclude political conversations related to the conflict in order to focus on issues of spirituality, religious texts, and rituals. While such activities aim to alter mischaracterizations about the religious traditions, it purposely avoids the overall political relationship of the parties. In other words, such activities may be better described as “people-to-people diplomacy,” a concept developed further by Saunders (1991, 50).

Secondly, both Abu-Nimer et al. (2007) and Landau (2003) highlighted a number of initiatives that utilized laypersons as the primary participants. This was the case for a majority of the activities characterized as *grassroots peacebuilding, symbolic ritual, and from personal grief to collective compassion*. Although the intent of many of the initiatives was to influence support for peace across the grassroots layer of the conflict, such participants may not be in the position to influence change on the vertical level of

the conflict. Scholars such as Saunders (1991) would generally instead describe such activities as “citizens’ diplomacy” rather than track-II diplomacy as focus is placed on the role of average citizens in diplomacy.

Conclusion #2: *Although interreligious track-II diplomacy utilizes participants not traditionally involved in track-II efforts, initiatives between Israelis and Palestinians generally share the same goals as other more traditional forms of track-II diplomacy. An exception may be related to the prominent view that their meeting can prevent a “spark” between populations.*

Respondents to this study articulated four general themes related to the goals of “interreligious track-II diplomacy.” Interreligious track-II initiatives aimed to a.) humanize the other and bridge differences between the Israeli and Palestinian populations, b.) alter the common misperception that religious actors do not believe in peace, c.) halt a “spark” between populations that could further deteriorate the conflict, and/or d.) instigate immediate changes to the political context between parties. Although responses within each of these themes were far from uniform, they do suggest that Palestinian-Israeli interreligious track-II efforts, by and large, strive to achieve similar outcomes as more traditional track-II efforts. One point of variation was the prominent assertion that interreligious track-II diplomacy can prevent potential “sparks” between grassroots actors. While this is not necessarily inconsistent with other track-II efforts, the findings suggest that Palestinian and Israeli religious leaders perceive themselves as having a unique ability to influence their constituencies on a grassroots level.

6.2 Findings and Conclusions of Research Objective #2

Conclusion #1: *Palestinian-Israeli interreligious track-II initiatives may have a stronger chance of viability within the horizontal level of the conflict as religious*

leaders perceive themselves as having greater influence on grassroots constituencies than political authorities.

While track-II diplomacy is built on the assumption that realizations, strategies, and options developed in informal setting will transfer back to more formal processes, scholars are left with the challenge of identifying concrete indicators of success. Hence, this thesis aimed to identify the perceived possibilities and barriers for the viability of the initiatives rather than testing if new ideas can be transferred. When looking to the religious leaders themselves, several themes emerged. First, Muslim, Christian, and Jewish leaders overwhelmingly viewed their role in peacebuilding as one better fit to influence grassroots levels of the conflict than formal political channels. Using language such as “enormous power” and “big credibility” to describe their position within grassroots movements, while paradoxically stating that their work does not permeate political systems and is “overwhelmingly subordinate” to formal political channels, religious leaders articulated a perception of doubt that their ideas will be transferred vertically. This could have a number of implications, such as religious leaders avoiding certain topics or neglecting pass ideas vertically. Yet, it also may serve as a key opportunity for religious leaders to transfer ideas horizontally due to a perception of unique influence.

Conclusion #2: *While the coupling of religion and politics in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict may be adversely contributing to the viability of interreligious track-II initiatives, interreligious track-II diplomacy may paradoxically be in the ideal position to untangle many religiously sensitive issues in the conflict that have been coupled with politics.*

Respondents to this study overwhelmingly perceived that the range of topics for discussion during interreligious track-II diplomacy either a.) was already restricted to certain topics, or b.) should be restricted to certain topics. While respondents were not unanimous on what topics should or should not covered in discussion, the findings

suggest that Israeli and Palestinian interreligious track-II participants may come to the table with different interpretations of what is “religious” what is “political.” It additionally suggests that participants of interreligious track-II diplomacy have different interpretations of the boundary to which religious leaders should discuss topics that are not solely related to spiritually. This issue presents what could be considered a *catch-22* for interreligious track-II diplomacy between Israelis and Palestinians. Without untangling the nuances between what is “political” and what is “religious,” the informal dialogues might serve as additional venue for the denial or suppression of fundamental human needs such as acceptance or validation. It may make it difficult to take on more “hard” track-II efforts as some religious leaders might perceive it since these goals as unreachable. At the same time, however, interreligious track-II diplomacy may be in the prime position to untangle the coupling of religion and politics in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, an issue that continues to exacerbate the conflict.

Conclusion #3: *Similar to other forms of track-II diplomacy, interreligious track-II initiatives between Israelis and Palestinians struggle to find the “ideal” participants – those who are open to new ideas while having proper influence on both the vertical and horizontal levels of the conflict.*

Many religious leaders voiced concern with finding the “right participants” who are willing to meet, but also have influence on the vertical and horizontal levels of the conflict. According to respondents, interreligious track-II initiatives between Israelis and Palestinians generally have included participants who already believed in the benefit of the meeting or are employed to be there. Religious leaders representing significant portions of both populations rarely, if ever, participate, which is often perceived as a limitation for the viability and impact of the initiatives. This challenge represents an overall limitation to track-II diplomacy, not exclusively interreligious track-II diplomacy, often cited by scholars.

Conclusion #4: *While the inclusion of heads of religious institutions to Palestinian-Israeli interreligious track-II diplomacy may provide a greater chance for viability within vertical levels, it may result in a process characterized by track-I-like features that are contrary to the logic of track-II diplomacy. Such initiatives may resemble “track one-and-a-half” diplomacy rather than track-II diplomacy.*

While the heads of religious institutions in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories may be in the best position to transfer new ideas to their respective governments, their inclusion may contribute to the initiative taking on many of the structural constraints present in formal, track-I processes. Muslim, Christian, and Jewish respondents to this study believe this is the case for two primary reasons: 1.) a perceived lack of freedom from the institution itself, and 2.) a perceived lack of distance from the official government structures. Respondents felt that heads of religious institutions may be unable to speak on behalf of their own opinions since they must consistently check with their constituencies to keep their position in the religious hierarchy. Additionally, since many of the positions are government appointed and funded, several respondents perceived that they take on an almost “diplomatic” role as they represent the formal government structures. These characteristics are contrary to the logic of track-II diplomacy as an informal supplement to formal channels, and might better be characterized as another form of peacebuilding known as “track-one-and-a-half” due to the inclusion of government employees.

6.3 Reflections and Recommendations

This thesis was initially conceptualized around the potential linkage between Palestinian-Israeli interreligious track-II initiatives with a formal track-I peace process. Given the lack of theoretical literature and the operational challenges of measuring impact on a peace process, the focus shifted to the question of the initiatives’ viability as a whole. Further research should focus on a case-specific interreligious track-II

initiative between Muslim, Christian, and Jewish participants to further explore the theoretical and empirical barriers and opportunities for linkage with formal processes. This would also be an opportunity to engage the question of “timing” related to initiatives (see section 5.5).

An additional area of further research would be related to the coupling of religion and politics in the Palestinian-Israeli context, specifically to explore the extent to which religious leaders actually can or cannot contribute to a final status peace agreement. As articulated by a number of respondents as well as the scholarly literature, some of the most religiously sensitive issues in the conflict (i.e. holy sites, the future of Jerusalem, the status of the *Haram al-Sharif*/Temple Mount) are linked with some of the most thorny legal and bureaucratic issues (legal jurisdiction, access, archeological protection, property rights, tax laws, and minority rights). A nuanced analysis of religious leaders’ potential contributions to a peace agreement is necessary.

Finally, further research ought to be carried out on the participation of parties currently absent from a majority of interreligious track-II efforts. While such research may be admittedly speculative, a discussion on the potential impact that “spoilers” may play on a future interreligious track-II driven agreement would be a valuable addition to the discourse on the field.

Throughout the long history of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, scholars and practitioners alike have recognized the potential value of track-II diplomacy toward managing, and eventually resolving, the conflict. This study has shown that the participation of religious actors can indeed be recognized as an underutilized subset of track-II diplomacy. Interreligious track-II efforts strive to fulfill many of the same objectives as more traditional track-II efforts, and they address many religiously charged issues that continue to exacerbate the conflict’s intractability. At the same time, however, interreligious track-II diplomacy faces the same challenges and

limitations as other more traditional forms of track-II diplomacy. Interreligious track-II diplomacy should not be misunderstood as a be-all-end-all-fix.

Ultimately, this thesis does not imply that religious actors are the missing piece toward breaking the Israeli-Palestinian stalemate, nor that all religious leaders are willing to be peacemakers. What it does suggest, however, is that religious actors in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories *do* have the potential to make a contribution toward peace. While this may not entail a signed peace agreement as a direct result of interreligious track-II efforts, their ability to think creatively together demonstrates the will and desire of the populations to live together in a just peace for all. As one religious leader concluded his interview, “We don’t do this work because we are going to succeed. We do it because it’s the right thing to do.”¹¹²

¹¹² Weiman-Kelman, Personal interview.

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Appendix A: Consent to Participate

TITLE:	Stalemate in the Holy Land: A Critical Examination of Palestinian-Israeli Interreligious Initiatives as Track-II Diplomacy
INVESTIGATOR:	Tyler James Dale Hauger [Contact Information Removed]
ADVISOR:	Anne Hege Grung [Contract Information Removed]
SOURCE OF SUPPORT:	The study is being conducted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Masters of Philosophy in Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Oslo.
PURPOSE:	You are being asked to participate in a research project that investigates the role of religion in diplomacy.
RISKS AND BENEFITS:	There are no inherent risks foreseen in this study. I will ask questions related to your thoughts and perceptions of religion's role in the conflict, the role of religious leaders in the peace process, and your thoughts and experiences with inter-religious initiatives.
COMPENSATION:	You will not receive any compensation for participating in this study.
CONFIDENTIALITY:	You will be asked if you prefer to remain anonymous or if your name and position can be cited in the research. No personal identity will be made in analysis if you prefer. All recorded and written materials and consent forms will be stored in a locked file at the investigators work office with access only to the investigator. The materials will only be used for purposes of this research project. All personal data, with the exception of the thesis,

will then be anonymized when the task is completed in November 2011.

RIGHT TO WITHDRAW: You are under no obligation to participate in this study. You are free to withdraw your consent to participate at any time.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS: A summary of the results of this research will be supplied to you, at no cost, upon request.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT: I have read the above statements and understand what is being asked of me. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time, for any reason, without penalty. On these terms, I certify that I am willing to participate in this research project.

I understand that should I have concerns about my participation in this study, I may email the investigator or call him at [contact information removed]. I can also contact Anne Hege Grung, faculty advisor of this study, at [contact information removed].

☐ I hereby give consent for my name and position to be included in the final research materials.

☐ I prefer to remain anonymous in the final research materials. My name and position will not be cited in the research.

Participants Signature

Date

Investigator's Signature

Date

Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview

Guide

- 1.) Can you tell me a little about yourself and how you became involved in interreligious work?
- 2.) Please tell me a little about the types of interreligious efforts have you been / are involved in?
- 3.) How would you respond to the claim that this conflict is a religious conflict?
- 4.) What are the assumptions, goals, or foundations of your work? / What would like to accomplish in these efforts?
- 5.) What are the major obstacles that you face in your interreligious work? / What are the biggest obstacles within your own religious group? / What are the biggest obstacles with other religious groups?
- 6.) What needs of the Palestinian/Israeli people, if any, do religious leaders bring forward to interreligious efforts?
- 7.) Can you tell me a bit about what types of participants are involved in these efforts?
- 8.) When, if ever, is it appropriate to talk about politics in interreligious efforts?
- 9.) How would your (respective) governments respond to new ideas generated in interreligious efforts?
- 10.) How do other leaders/ members of your religion respond to your interreligious efforts?